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JUDAISM

Jewish Divorce and the Secular Law

Mark J. Loewenstein

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Shulamit Magnus

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Holocaust Survivors in American Society

William B. Helmreich

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JUDAISM

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.

The First Reader

What If They Don't "Live Happily Ever After"?

We all know that the rosy picture of bliss that is presented in fairy tales is often not true in reality — witness the staggering number of marriages that end in divorce. The statistics are, alas, all too true of Jewish marriages also. But, in these cases, there may be a further complication. Orthodox and Conservative practice requires not only a divorce, but a religious *get* should re-marriage be contemplated. Unscrupulous husbands frequently refuse to give such a *get*, and there have been both religious and secular legal attempts to deal with those contingencies. In “Jewish Divorce and the Secular Law,” *Mark J. Loewenstein* discusses the efficacy and the legality of these attempts.

The Survivors' Contributions

A full generation after the Holocaust, the great silence about it has finally come to an end. Survivors are reminiscing, historians are recording, and sociologists are collating and dissecting what happened to those who managed to escape from Europe. In a variation on that theme, *William B. Helmreich* shows us “The Impact of Holocaust Survivors on American Society: A Socio-Cultural Portrait.” In it, he looks at the refugees from the point of view of what *they* have contributed to *this* country. The paper is full of remarkably heartening information that testifies to the stamina of a great many of the Jews who came out alive from Hitler's death-trap.

The “Other Half”

A great many years ago, I had a student who was busy looking for a cause (instead of devoting himself to his academic work) and, having stumbled into one of the first NOW conventions, he discovered, to his amazement, that half of the world is made up of women! The young man was not unique. This unawareness of that statistic was, equally, one that characterized the Jewish world throughout most of its history. Many instances of this obliviousness are cited by *Shulamit Magnus* in “‘Out of the Ghetto’: Integrating the Study of Jewish Women Into the Study of ‘the

Jews'." Our readers will find much in the paper that may cause them to change some of their own perspectives.

Must Isaac and Ishmael Always Be Enemies?

The conflict between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael — the Jews and the Arabs — seems to have started in early Biblical days. That, at least, has been the standard Rabbinic interpretation in which, generally, Ishmael gets a "bad press." There are, however, interpretations to the contrary, which point out that the brothers did get together for their father's funeral and that they could live peacefully side by side.

Extrapolating from these "minority opinions," *David J. Zucker* holds out some hope for the future. In "Conflicting Conclusions: The Hatred of Isaac and Ishmael," he suggests that, with the passage of time, the conflicts may be resolved, but that patience is the watchword.

Another approach to the same topic is presented in "Politics and the Ethics of Judaism," a paper by *Robert Gordis*. The nouns in the title, he says, are not antithetical, and both must be linked in the solution of current Israeli-Arab problems.

Thoughts and Questions About God

How do you reconcile what are, seemingly, irreconcilables? If God is omnipotent, is He, then, the source of evil? If He is omniscient, is man little more than a puppet on a string? Can God be finite and still be omnipotent? Philosophers and simple people alike have struggled with these and related questions since time immemorial and, of course, they have come up with a wide variety of answers. To this day there is no definitive, single one.

In his paper, "Omnipotence, Omniscience and a Finite God," *Gilbert S. Rosenthal* presents an overview of many of the answers, Jewish and non-Jewish, to the question of God's essence, and then concludes with his own interpretation. Readers may find here a corroboration of their views about God or a challenge to them.

Fathers and Sons

Differences in the father-son relationship may be based not only on the particular characteristics of the individuals involved, but, also, on a national outlook. In the Greek legends we find instance after instance where fathers and sons see each other as a threat in the struggle for power, while, in the Bible, the picture of Abraham and Isaac is that "they went both of them together" — this on the way to the *akedah*, to the commanded sacrifice of Isaac. This "togetherness" has often been held up as an example of heroic faith, and that view is reiterated in the paper by *Kalman J. Kaplan*, "Isaac and Oedipus: A Re-examination of the Father-Son Rela-

tionship.” Isaac did not have to fear for his life at the hands of his father because he knew that he was destined to be his heir. If it were otherwise, God’s promise to Abraham that he would be the progenitor of a great nation would have been vitiated.

There Is A Jewish Critical Approval

The maxim of Yehudah Leib Gordon that the ideal behavior for the 19th century Jew was that he be a Jew at home and an ordinary citizen in public was not at all true of Max Margolis, the distinguished historian and Bible scholar whose major work was done early in the twentieth century. In his Biblical criticism he always stressed his Jewish approach. Quoting from an article by Margolis, *Leonard Greenspoon* cites: “If Christian scholars . . . bluntly assert that their exegesis of the OT is, and must be, Christian . . . my understanding of the OT is, and must be, Jewish.” “On the Jewishness of Modern Jewish Biblical Scholarship: The Case of Max L. Margolis” is a revelation of how, all through his scholarly days, Margolis staunchly upheld his principles.

Who Are Your Ancestors?

In an engaging, short piece with a long title, “*Yichus in the Shtetl and Dignitas in the Late Roman Republic*,” *Saul Bastomsky* defines both *yichus* and *dignitas* and points out their salient differences. Though he limits his discussion of *yichus* to the *shtetl*, the truth is that it was always a factor in Jewish life (and in most people’s lives) to this very day. We still speak of people “from a good family;” Mayflower descendants and DAR ladies still boast about their antecedents; Sephardim and Ashkenazim have different and, sometimes, disparaging views of each other, as do Litvaks and Galitzianer. A concern with *yichus* is to be found all over. To prove our point we would draw the reader’s attention to Mr. Bastomsky’s identification. He teaches at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. That bit of information also proves how widespread is the readership of this journal and, we hope, its influence.

Hebrew in the United States

Hebrew poets writing in the United States seem to be an anomaly, but there were such people earlier in this century. As a matter of fact, there were quite a number of them. In “B.N. Silkiner and His Circle: The Genesis of the New Hebrew Literature in America,” *Jacob Kabakoff* introduces the reader to this group of remarkably talented and inspired writers whose diversity of interest was extraordinary. The paper presents an aspect of American Jewish life that is worthy of more attention, both from the sociological as well as the literary point of view.

How Do You Say That In . . . ?

How accurate can a translation be? Must it be literal or should it, also, try to capture the spirit, the mood and the style of the original? The problem is not a new one and, apparently, was already a matter of concern to our scholarly forefathers, whose views are recorded in the Talmud. *William Cutter*, in "Citing and Translating a Context: The Talmud in Its 'Post Modern' Setting," discusses the problems and pitfalls of moving from one language to another.

Women Are Different

Since, in the early days of settlement in Erez Yisrael, women labored alongside of men in the strenuous work that was required, the popular assumption has been that "Women's lib" would find no opposition there. But that assumption is not grounded in reality. Sociological studies have indicated that Israeli women have to fight as hard for their rights, these days, as do their counterparts in most Western countries.

This "discrimination" against women is seen in literature as well, where they are frequently seen as "the other" — a term that is to be taken pejoratively — if they are not neglected completely or, at best, presented as flat and dull creatures.

In a review-essay, "Perspective and Protest," *Zvia Ginor* analyzes two recent books, dissecting their different approaches and different subject matters. She adroitly avoids taking sides, concluding that a pluralism of critical approaches would be most desirable.

R.B.W.

Jewish Divorce and the Secular Law

MARK J. LOEWENSTEIN

UNTIL RELATIVELY MODERN TIMES, MATTERS relating to marriage and divorce in the Western world were within the jurisdiction of religious communities and authorities. The first significant forays of the state into these and other family matters occurred during the Enlightenment period in Europe, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This corresponded with a period in which societies became secularized and, for many people, there was no authoritative religious body to handle these concerns. For a period thereafter, religious law and civil law co-existed in some European countries, with religious law applying to citizens who recognized its authority.

In the United States, the states have assumed jurisdiction over matters of marriage and divorce, at least for purposes of defining the legal rights and obligations of citizens of the state. Unless the state formally dissolves a marriage, it continues for all legal purposes. By the same token, once the state dissolves a marriage, the parties are legally free to remarry.

This reality has posed a challenge and, in some cases, a crisis, for Jewish law. What recognition, if any, should be given to secular adjudications that affect the marital status of Jews? Jewish marriage is more than a legal relationship; it is sanctified upon its consummation and carries with it religious significance. Jewish law regarding marriage and divorce is based on several Biblical passages and has undergone numerous refinements over the centuries. Should it be replaced, in the Diaspora, by secular law?, should it be modified to be consistent with prevailing secular law?, or should it seek to ignore secular law?

The three major movements in Judaism — Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox — have each reacted differently, and characteristically, to this challenge, and their varied reactions have been a source of tension among them and a source of confusion for the Jewish people. At the same time, the state's involvement in a matter that was, for centuries, a religious concern and remains such for many, raises difficult legal problems as well as important issues concerning the relationship between religion and the state in our constitutional system.

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The Traditional Approach

Orthodox Jewish law has not recognized the validity of a civil divorce and has not made a Jewish divorce readily available upon the secular dissolution of a marriage. Therefore, a Jew who entered into a valid Jewish marriage is not free to remarry under Orthodox Jewish law unless a religious divorce is also obtained. Of equal importance, if a Jewish woman is divorced civilly, but not under traditional Jewish law, she enters into an unusual status under *halakhah* (Jewish law and tradition). She is prohibited from remarrying under Jewish law and is called an *agunah*. If she does remarry civilly while an *agunah*, the children of this second union are considered *mamzerim*. A *mamzer* is, for many purposes, not part of the Jewish community and may be disabled from entering into a marriage recognized as valid under Jewish law.

An Orthodox Jewish divorce is easy to obtain if both parties agree to it. With some minor exceptions, a Jewish divorce must be initiated by the husband, who executes an instrument known as a *get*, which contains an anciently prescribed text that, in effect, announces the husband's desire to dissolve the marriage. The document is then delivered to the wife and, when she accepts it, the divorce is completed.

While this process is simple enough, there are some interesting subtleties. First, only the husband can initiate the process. Second, the husband's actions must be of his own free will; acts under compulsion are without legal effect. From these two factors follows a third: Rabbinical courts lack the authority to dissolve a marriage without the husband's voluntary cooperation. While there are some exceptions to this last statement, they are so limited as to have little relevance in the vast majority of cases.

The problem that this has created under Orthodox law is clear: so long as Jews can resort to civil law to dissolve a marriage, there can be no assurance that a religious divorce will follow. Moreover, because of the unfavorable position in which a woman with a secular, but not a religious divorce, finds herself under Jewish law, a man who threatens to withhold a *get* is able to negotiate more favorable terms in the civil divorce. The inequities are significant and beg for some solution.

The Reaction of Reform and Conservative Judaism

Unlike the Orthodox movement, Reform and Conservative Judaism have responded to this problem. The Reform movement has simply dispensed with the requirement that a divorced person obtain a *get* to remarry. As is consistent with other Reform practices, *halakhah* poses no obstacle to the practices of a Reform Jew. Of course, the failure of a Reform Jew to secure a valid Jewish divorce may create problems

later in life for that individual or his or her offspring, but that possibility is one which Reform Jews, as a movement, are willing to accept.

A different approach, which might be thought of as a “contractual solution,” is being tried by the Conservative movement. The Conservative rabbis have modified the *ketubah*, the “marriage contract” that is signed by the betrothed couple, generally just before the wedding ceremony takes place. This document now contains a provision reciting the agreement of the bride and bridegroom to

recognize the *beth din* of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America or its duly appointed representatives, as having the authority to counsel us . . . and to summon either party at the request of the other, in order to enable the party so requesting to live in accordance with the standards of Jewish law of marriage throughout his or her lifetime. We authorize the *beth din* to impose such terms of compensation as it may see fit for failure to respond to its summons or to carry out its decisions.

The apparent intent of this provision is to facilitate the participation of the *beth din* (a rabbinical tribunal) in the marriage dissolution (should one party desire the tribunal’s participation) and, thereby, it is hoped, facilitate the execution, delivery, and acceptance of a *get*, should that be appropriate.

The Conservative rabbis did not go as far as they could have in this contractual solution. Why not provide, for instance, that upon civil dissolution of a marriage, the bridegroom agrees, if requested by the bride, to execute and deliver a *get*, and the bride agrees that if the bridegroom delivers a *get* to her, she will accept it? The rabbis were probably reluctant to go so far; many would seek to deviate as little from current practice as is absolutely necessary to accomplish the objectives sought. The solution may also represent the fruits of a compromise. In any event, the contractual solution is classically Conservative — a small but arguably inoffensive step from tradition. The lack of boldness, however, is not its only weakness.

Aside from the obvious limitation that the contractual solution does not assure a religious divorce following a secular one, it may not even be legal under civil law, on which it depends for its enforcement. The contractual solution, insofar as it is intended to be legally enforceable, necessarily assumes that a civil court would order a recalcitrant spouse to appear before a *beth din* and, presumably, would order compliance with the decision of the *beth din*. The former is necessary or else the *beth din* could not possibly influence an individual who is otherwise unwilling to participate in the process. The latter is necessary because otherwise the decisions of the *beth din* would be advisory only and could be ignored by either party.

There is one case in which the court has indicated that it would order a party to appear before a *beth din* in accordance with the terms

of the *ketubah*. In 1983, the New York Court of Appeals (the highest state court in New York) ruled in a case called *Avitzur v. Avitzur* that the *ketubah* could be treated like any other antenuptial agreement in which the parties agree to arbitrate their differences in a nonjudicial forum. For purposes of its decision, however, the Court assumed that the parties intended the *ketubah* to be a binding contract.

Had the case gone to trial, the plaintiff (in this case the wife) would have been required to prove that the parties intended to create a binding contract, in the sense that we normally think of the word, when they signed the *ketubah*. Intuitively, that seems hard to prove. Typically, the *ketubah* is signed by the bride and bridegroom just minutes before the wedding ceremony. There may or may not be time for the rabbi to explain its terms, much less their import. It is a bit hard to imagine a rabbi, at that time and under those circumstances, admonishing the parties that the document which they are executing has legal implications. Even if a rabbi were to go that far, there is no time for the parties to reflect on their actions and reach any kind of considered judgment.

The New York Court's analogy to other antenuptial agreements was disingenuous. The typical antenuptial agreement is negotiated at arm's length. Each party is usually represented by separate counsel and there can be no doubt that a binding agreement is intended. There is a legal solemnity to such agreements which is totally absent from the execution of a *ketubah*.

Even if the parties intended the *ketubah* to be binding, there are still problems with its enforceability. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution creates a barrier between church and state that would, or at least arguably may, be breached when a civil court orders a party to comply with a *ketubah*. The jurisprudence developed under the First Amendment suggests that the separation is breached when the government, through any of its branches, becomes excessively entangled in religious matters, and such excessive entanglement would occur were a court to resolve a dispute on the basis of some religious doctrine.

The *ketubah* case invites just that possibility. The *ketubah* speaks in terms of the "standards of the Jewish law of marriage" — a phrase filled with ambiguity. It could be argued that those standards do not require a man to appear before a *beth din* if the *beth din* has been convened to convince him to execute a *get*. If the argument is raised, the civil court would then have to dismiss the case or determine just what Jewish family law requires in this regard. That inquiry would quite clearly be inappropriate under current constitutional interpretation.

In short, the contractual solution is unsatisfactory. Recognizing that, or possibly concluding that the traditional form of the *ketubah* is sacrosanct, the Orthodox movement has adopted a truly "radical" approach, which might be termed the "secular legislative solution." The

only example of this solution can be found, not surprisingly, in the State of New York, where the legislature has enacted a statute at the behest of the religious community.

The Legislative Solution

This remarkable piece of legislation, popularly known as the “*get* statute,” does not refer expressly to a *get* or, indeed, to a Jewish marriage. It “simply” requires, with some important exceptions, that the plaintiff in a New York divorce proceeding, and both parties in certain uncontested divorce proceedings, represent to the court that he or she has taken, or will take, “all steps solely within his or her power to remove any barrier to the other party’s remarriage following the divorce.” The statute defines a “barrier to remarriage” so narrowly that only the failure to execute or accept a *get* qualifies.

The statute is deficient in many respects and is of doubtful constitutional validity. As a preliminary matter, because the statute imposes an obligation only on the plaintiff (except in certain uncontested proceedings), Jewish women filing divorce actions are not being helped in obtaining a *get*. This is ironic, because Jewish women are the ones most in need of protection.

Secondly, the statute ties the definition of a “barrier to remarriage” to the “principles of the clergyman . . . who has solemnized the marriage.” If the first marriage was officiated (solemnized?) by a Reform rabbi or by a justice of the peace or, as is permitted in some states, was accomplished by the parties themselves without any religious or civilian official, the statute would have no applicability. Ironically, it is possible under Jewish law to enter into a valid marriage without the services of a rabbi. In any event, if a Jewish woman was not married by an Orthodox or Conservative rabbi and she now seeks a divorce in New York to enable her to remarry into the observant community, the statute would be of no help.

Aside from these loopholes (and there are others), the statute appears to be hopelessly unconstitutional — hopeless in the sense that its infirmities are beyond repair. The First Amendment prohibits the state from “establishing a religion.” A substantial body of law has developed, testing governmental action against this restraint. Under one line of cases, the government’s preferences of one religious denomination over another constitutes an unconstitutional preference. The *get* statute has just that effect — the Jewish practices are assisted by the statute to the exclusion of practices of other religions. In another sense, all other religious denominations are preferred to Judaism — only Jews (and, more particularly, only Jews married by Conservative and Orthodox rabbis) must comply with this statute. The state has thus created a preference of sorts for all other religious denominations.

The constitutional infirmities do not end with the preference problem. Under another line of cases, governmental action violates the Establishment Clause if the challenged action has as its purpose or primary effect the advancement of religion, or results in the excessive entanglement of the government into religious matters. If *any* of these three prohibitions is violated, the statute or other governmental action in question will be declared unconstitutional. The *get* statute arguably fails under all three tests.

As to purpose, the statute's proponents have argued that it is intended to further the state's policy of facilitating remarriage. But, as a secular matter, there is no impediment to remarriage. The legislature's concern was with a religious impediment to remarriage; its purpose was to satisfy a religious requirement to remarriage.

As to effect, the statute advances principles of Jewish law in addition to having the effect of preferring Judaism to other denominations, as noted above.

Finally, the statute invites an impermissible entanglement of religion and state. The statute prohibits the finalization of the divorce if the clergyman who solemnized the marriage certifies that the plaintiff has failed to take the necessary steps to remove the barriers to the defendant's remarriage. Such a delegation of state authority to a religious official would appear to be unconstitutional. Moreover, if the plaintiff were to contest the rabbi's conclusions, the court might find itself in the uncomfortable situation of having to resolve a religious dispute on the basis of religious doctrine. A long line of U.S. Supreme Court cases prohibits just that.

Unfortunately (for the statute's proponents), the statute's constitutional problems extend beyond the Establishment Clause. The First Amendment also prohibits the government from interfering with an individual's religious beliefs (or nonbeliefs, as the case may be). This aspect of the First Amendment is commonly known as the Free Exercise Clause. To a certain extent, participation in executing, delivering and accepting a *get* is participation in a religious ceremony. If a man has rejected Judaism, it is not hard to see how court-compelled participation in a Jewish divorce would interfere with his religious freedom. There is ample precedent for protecting him under the umbrella of the Free Exercise Clause.

The New York legislature has gone well beyond the precedents that permit the government to make reasonable accommodations so that its citizens can freely engage in their religious practices. In other instances, the state has taken action because it has somehow made it more difficult for its citizens freely to practice their religion. In the *get* statute, the state has recognized religious practices that have created problems for some of its citizens, and has sought to solve those problems.

Conclusion

The deficiencies of the “contract solution” and the “statutory solution” suggest that the answer must lie elsewhere. One alternative, which predates either of these solutions, is an *ad hoc* judicial solution, in which a party simply asks the divorce court to condition the finalization of a divorce on the accomplishment of a religious divorce. The trouble with this solution is that it suffers from many of the same constitutional infirmities discussed above; some courts, in any case, are reluctant to grant such relief; and it is of no effect in default divorces.

All this points in one direction: Judaism must find its own solution. Through the centuries, the rabbis have found ways to modify many rules, including the laws relating to marriage and divorce. Instances can also be found in which rabbinical courts ordered a man to execute a *get*. But, in those instances, the court had at its disposal some means to enforce its decrees; at the very least, it could rely on community pressure for the enforcement of its decrees. In our secular society, those means no longer exist, and Jewish law cannot continue on as though they did.

The sad fact is that Orthodox Jewish law in this area has stagnated. Professor Ze'ev Falk, an authority on Jewish family law at Hebrew University, has observed that, “As a reaction to the various challenges of Reform and Conservative Judaism, Jewish Orthodoxy has given up any legislative action whatsoever.” This stands in stark contrast to developments in earlier ages, where there appeared to be greater sensitivity by the Orthodox hierarchy to the needs of the governed.

Two other observations can be made about the problem of Jewish divorce and secular law. First, it provides a classic case for viewing how organized Judaism deals with a clash between tradition and modernity. At the one extreme, Reform Judaism ignores the problem, holding that *halakhah* does not apply. At the other extreme, Orthodox Judaism feels powerless to effectuate a solution within Judaism, turning, instead, somewhat ironically, to the civil authorities. In the middle, Conservative Judaism, with a cautious move, has attempted a solution that may or may not be effective.

Second, the problem of Jewish divorce is just one manifestation of the larger problem of the status of women in Jewish law. Jewish women do not share equal status with Jewish men, and this disparity has become a source of tension in recent years. One scholar has suggested (optimistically, I believe) that real change in Jewish family law will come about after women study the law, participate in the discussion of the issues, and acquire the authority of judges and rabbis. One might reasonably suspect that reform in Jewish family law would precede the ordination of Orthodox women rabbis, but neither seems to be in the immediate future.

The Impact of Holocaust Survivors on American Society: A Socio-Cultural Portrait

WILLIAM B. HELMREICH

Introduction

Their battered suitcases, rolled-up blankets, and other personal belongings, which they held on to during frightful years of captivity or semi-slavery, tell endless stories of human suffering . . . Reporters aboard the SS Marine Flasher tell us how these passengers, instead of breaking down as a result of their past tribulations, were very active and cheerful throughout the journey. Many volunteered to do odd jobs; a group of orphaned youths helped the short-handed kitchen staff. A barber clipped the hair of the officers.¹

THUS BEGINS ONE OF THE FIRST ACCOUNTS of the 176,500 Holocaust survivors who came to the United States and Canada in the years 1945 to 1953.² There is an almost buoyant quality to some of these early descriptions. Indeed, the immigrants are sometimes described by proponents of immigration eager to garner sympathy for the refugees as "pioneers", emulating America's earlier arrivals. On the other hand, the social work journals tell a somewhat different story. They write of immigrants who had difficulty adapting to the relatives and friends who welcomed them into their homes, and the struggle to find adequate housing and decent jobs.³ Similarly, the psychiatric

1. Alfred Werner, "The New Refugees," *Jewish Frontier*, (July 1946):23.

2. Kurt Grossman Mss., Box 55, Folder 9, "Third Annual Report: New York Association for New Americans Inc." (New York: Leo Baeck Institute); *Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds Papers: Agency Files*, Box 148, "USNA Correspondence Misc., 1944-1955, Budget Reports" (Waltham, Mass.: American Jewish Historical Society); Joseph Kage, "Canadian Immigrants . . . Facts, Figures and Trends," *Rescue*, (Fall 1953):5. The number of immigrants to the United States was about 140,000, while the number who entered Canada was approximately 36,500, including 2,000 who came in 1953.

3. See, for example, Beatrice Frankel and Ruth Michaels, "A Changing Focus in Work With Young, Unattached DPs," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 27 (March 1951):321-331; Fred Berl, "The Immigrant Situation as Focus of the Helping Process," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 26 (March 1950):377-392; Sidney S. Eisenberg, "Phases in the Resettlement Process and Their Significance for Casework With New Americans," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 27 (September 1950):86-96.

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literature presents cases of individuals who experienced anxiety, depression and paranoia, often lumping their diagnosis under the now common term, "concentration camp survivor syndrome."⁴

What, in fact, really happened to the survivors in the last forty years? How did they fare in their efforts to start over? How did they do economically? What about their family lives and, in particular, their children? Did those who came in their youth begin new careers or attend universities in any appreciable numbers? What were the contributions of these refugees to American life and to the Jewish communities in which they settled?

There has been very little written about these questions because, until now, the emphasis has been on the pathology of the survivors, their psychological problems and, to a lesser but still considerable extent, their physical ailments.⁵ This is due largely to the fact that it is those with the most serious problems who, so far, have come to the attention of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. The successful or unsuccessful treatment of these individuals was then written up and published in journals.

Unfortunately, we do not know how representative these cases are of the average survivors who did not request therapy, and those constitute the vast majority of survivors. No doubt there were many survivors who needed treatment and never received it, many who suffered nightmares for years and accepted them as part of the survivor's burden. Nevertheless, we cannot establish patterns from which generalizations can be drawn until we have truly random samples made up of non-clinical groups of survivors. In short, we need a "sociology of the survivor community" that will complement the already significant contributions made by the therapists. Only in this way will we be able to understand the survivors as a whole.⁶ What follows in these pages is

4. See, for instance, William G. Niederland, "Clinical Observations on the Survivor Syndrome," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 49 (1968):313-315; M.A. Berezin, "The Aging Survivor of the Holocaust. Introduction," *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 14, No. 2 (1981):131-133; G. Bychowski, Permanent Character Changes as an Aftereffect of Persecution," in H. Krystal, ed., *Massive Psychic Trauma* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968), pp.75-86; Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

5. See P. Chodoff, "Effects of Extreme Coercive and Oppressive Forces: Brainwashing and Concentration Camps" in S. Arieti, ed., *American Handbook of Psychiatry* (New York: Basic books, 1959), pp. 384-405; T. S.Nathan, L. Eitinger, and H. Z. Winnik, "A Psychiatric Study of Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust; A Study of Hospitalized Patients," *Israel Annual of Psychiatry and Related Disciplines* 2, No. 1 (1964):47-80; Shama Davidson, "The Clinical Effects of Massive Psychic Trauma in Families of Holocaust Survivors," *Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy* 6, No. 1 (1980): 11-21; V.M. Morosow, "Late Sequelae in Former Deportees and Concentration Camp Survivors," *Journal of Neuropsychology and Psychiatry* 58, No. 3 (1958):373-380; H. Krystal, ed., *Massive Psychic Trauma*.

6. An exception is Morton Weinfeld, John J. Sigal, William W. Eaton, "Long Term Effects of the Holocaust on Selected Social Attitudes and Behaviors of Survivors: A Cautionary

a beginning effort to answer the sociological question of what the survivors achieved as a group in the United States.

Arrival in America

In the years between 1945 and 1952, hundreds of ships carrying thousands of refugees traversed the route between Europe, usually Bremerhaven, Germany, and various American ports, most often New York and Boston. Specifically, between October 30, 1948 and July 21, 1952, 308 ships (as well as 284 planes) arrived, bringing almost 400,000 Jews and Gentiles to the U.S.⁷ The passengers' fare was often advanced by either the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) or the United Service for New Americans (USNA). The boats, like the *Uruguay*, *Marine Perch*, *Marine Jumper*, *New Hellas*, *General McRae*, *General Muir*, and the *Marine Marlin*, were actually U.S. Army transport ships that had been pressed into service after extensive duty during the war.

The accommodations were scarcely luxurious. As Willie Herskovits, a passenger on the *Ernie Pyle*, who is currently living in Brooklyn, N.Y., described it:

The boat left from Bremerhaven. But for three months there was a strike. It took us thirteen days and cost \$225.00 each for me and my wife. There were maybe 1,000 people on the boat and they were, I think, all Jewish. There were about 200 people to a room and three beds, one on top of the others.⁸

There were no planned activities for the passengers. The small library was usually used as a meeting place where people discussed what they would do once they arrived in America, the occupations that they would enter, and the friends and relatives who would assist them. The majority suffered from seasickness, and many recall spending a good portion of the trip lying in bed. Nevertheless, their discomfort was soon forgotten once the trip ended. Luba Bat, the niece of American labor leader Sidney Hillman, was one of those passengers. Looking out from the deck of the *SS Uruguay* in 1946 as it steamed into New York's harbor, she observed: "The sight of the grandiose skyscrapers fascinated me; in Poland we called them 'cloud scratchers.'" Her aunt, Bessie Hillman, asked Luba to smile for the photographers as she alighted from the ship. "Why smile?" she asked. "Don't ask *kashes* (questions)," retorted Hillman. "Just smile; this is America."⁹

In most cases, the immigrants were met by representatives of HIAS,

Note," *Social Forces* 60 (1981): 1-19. See also, Jack Nusan Porter, "Is There a Survivor Syndrome?: Psychological and Sociological Implications," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism*, No. 1 (1981):33-52.

7. *Memo to America. The DP Story: The Final Report of the U.S. Displaced Persons Commission* (Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952).

8. Interview, December 30, 1987.

9. Luba Bat, *Phoenix* (Yad Vashem Archives, n.d.), mimeograph, n.p.

who guided them through customs. These individuals were generally fluent in several languages, including Yiddish, and were trained to deal with a variety of problems that could, and did, come up after the passengers disembarked. Among them might be having an ambulance at the dock for anyone who required hospitalization because of illness that had developed during the trip, serving as interpreter to immigration officials, cutting through red tape so that an immigrant could get on the train bound for St. Louis where he would be met by anxious relatives, and the like.¹⁰

Resettlement of the Immigrants

The majority of immigrants remained in the New York area, but sizeable numbers of refugees took up residence elsewhere. By the end of July, 1949, arrivals under the 1948 Displaced Persons (DP) Act had been settled in 334 communities in 43 states. HIAS had offices in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, and Baltimore. According to the Council of Jewish Federations, family agencies in Newark, St. Louis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Oakland, Portland, Oregon, and St. Paul, reported that, in 1948, one-half or more of their caseloads were immigrants.¹¹

These figures are important in terms of understanding the contributions of the survivors. What they mean is that the survivors came into contact with a broad cross-section of the American population. They did not settle only in Jewish ghettos. Moreover, those who went elsewhere were forced to interact with others who knew little about their culture and experiences. Indeed, survivors who settled outside of the major Jewish population centers often prided themselves on having become more Americanized than those who did not. One such individual, a resident of Minneapolis, recounted how, after 40 years, she had little in common with survivors who had remained in New York and still thought like "greeners."¹²

In many, perhaps the majority, of instances, refugees settled outside of the New York area at the urging of HIAS, which frequently made the arrangements with their new communities while the refugees were still in the DP camps. In part, this was motivated by a desire to dispel the stereotype that Jews were capable of dwelling only in urban ghettos. There was also the feeling that the immigrants would assimilate faster in places with small Jewish populations.¹³

10. Jack Shafer, "HIAS Pier Representatives Welcome Immigrants Here," *Rescue*, (January 1947):4-5.

11. Morris Zelditch, "Immigrant Aid," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1950, vol.51 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1950), pp. 195,198.

12. Interview, Hinda Kibort, February 25, 1988.

13. Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 203.

Quite a few (how many is not known) immigrants eventually drifted back to major Jewish communities because the adjustment was too difficult in outlying locales. Some, however, found that life in the hinterlands could be appealing. One couple decided that they would stay only one month in the small Texas community of McAllen, to which they had been sent by the resettlement agency, but, much to their surprise, they fell in love with the town and remained: "McAllen had, in short, captivated [the wife] . . . drawn her deeply into its small-town life and ways. The kindness of the people! The warmth they had shown so unstintingly."¹⁴ Another immigrant explained her decision to move to Kansas City as follows:

I believe they were overcrowded, those states, so we just picked Kansas City. We took the map and we looked at it and we said, the President of the United States (Truman) comes from Missouri. From Independence, but that is close to Kansas City. We took the heart of America and came here.¹⁵

Among the arrivals were more than 1,000 survivors who became farmers and settled in places like Vineland, New Jersey, Petaluma, California and Danielson, Connecticut. In many cases, the farmers were helped by the Jewish Colonization Association. For example, the Association placed nineteen families of immigrants in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, where they established fruit and dairy farms.¹⁶ The Jewish Agricultural Society, which also assisted the immigrants, organized educational and cultural activities to aid the recent arrivals, with talks on purchasing and marketing, poultry medicine, and related topics.¹⁷ These were necessary since many of the refugees had had no experience in farming but had chosen this way of life because they wanted an environment away from the city, with clean air and quiet. In fact, an occupational survey of Jews in European DP assembly centers found that only 2.8% could be classified as being in farm-related activities.¹⁸

Other survivors were sent to American universities, where, under the sponsorship of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation, many of them made good use of their educational opportunities and became successful professionals. Typical was Eugene Schoenfeld, who studied at Washington University in St. Louis and later became Chairman of the So-

14. Dorothy Rabinowitz, *New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America* (New York: Avon, 1976), p. 125.

15. Helen Epstein, *A Study in American Pluralism Through Oral Histories of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: William E. Weiner Oral History Library of the American Jewish Committee, 1975) (report).

16. Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Hand: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 246.

17. Joseph Brandes, *Immigrants to Freedom: Jewish Communities in Rural New Jersey Since 1982* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), p. 329.

18. Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors*, p. 278.

ciology Department at Georgia State University. Another survivor studied at the University of Washington in Seattle and became a successful painter.¹⁹

Working in America

Knowing the type of work engaged in by the immigrants is of value in assessing the contributions that they ultimately made. We can say, at the onset, that they were handicapped in several ways. First, in most cases, their experiences during the war had tremendously weakened them, and the majority were still recovering, both physically and psychologically, when they arrived in the United States. Second, they spoke little or no English, and were unfamiliar with American culture and ways. How unfamiliar can be discerned from the vignette of a survivor who tells how he arrived in Boston and was told to travel by train to Philadelphia where arrangements had been made for him to work and live. He protested to the agency official in charge that he had relatives in New York City. When told that he could visit them on weekends, he asked how this could be arranged if he had no pass or special privilege allowing him to travel from Philadelphia to New York! He was both amazed and relieved when informed that, in America, no such permission was required.²⁰

Most of the immigrants who came here were between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five and were the ones who were most likely to have survived the rigors and hardships of the war. Many of them had been compelled to interrupt their education and training and, thus, were at a disadvantage when it came to starting over in a new land. In addition, the occupations for which they had been trained were not always in demand here. In some professions, such as law, their training was not considered valid or relevant. Added to these problems were the normal ones of adjustment that face all immigrants.

The evidence that we have suggests that the refugees made strenuous, often heroic, efforts to overcome these deficiencies. The resilience and survival skills that they had demonstrated during the war were often transferred to the American scene. Typical of such efforts was the case of Edward Goodman, a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota:

When I came here I tried to get a job in international trade — like what I was doing in Czechoslovakia. And so I went to all the big companies ... who had an international department. Went to Minnesota Mining, to Cargill, General Mills, Pillsbury, Honeywell. Everybody was very nice ... It's wonderful. Wonderful experience. We'll hire you ... I worked with an agency downtown and they told me, "Ed, there isn't a single Jew working in these companies," and they say "You'll never get a job

19. Sylvia Rothchild, ed., *Voices from the Holocaust* (New York: Meridian, 1982), pp. 314-321.

20. Interview, Willie Lieberman, January 6, 1988.

there. You might as well forget it." That was the end of my looking for an affluent career in the United States.²¹

But it was by no means the end for Goodman. It was only the beginning, for, as he recalls: "I was hungry and we had nothing to live on. And I looked for a job high and low. That was in 1948 and there was big unemployment in the United States." Finally, the Jewish Family Service found a job for him — making sandwiches during the graveyard shift in a restaurant called Hasty Tasty. We see here not only the difficulties, but the perseverance that was required, perseverance that did not, as the following account indicates, always pay off:

They asked me if I am a cook. In fact the only thing I knew how to cook is hot water. But I was making sandwiches and hamburgers and they promoted me the third night to make waffles, and that was my downfall. Was a very busy Friday night, and I forgot to take the waffle out — smoked up the place, lost their customers. They picked me up and they kicked me out so fast they say I should never come back.²²

In her book, *New Lives*, Dorothy Rabinowitz asserts that "survivors in considerable numbers involved themselves in building and construction careers — immensely successful ones, as it turned out, for some of them."²³ As an example she mentions the Shapell brothers, who survived Auschwitz and who, in this country, became leading manufacturers of prefabricated houses. Although more empirical research is needed, there seems to have been a trend among the survivors to enter occupations where they could be independent. One could speculate that their experiences had made them reluctant to put themselves in a position where others could determine their fate. The initiative required of them, and the risks that they took, were also rooted in their experiences. They were people who had often literally returned from the dead and, therefore, felt that they had little to lose.

In an effort to determine these and other behavioral patterns, 236 oral histories on deposit at Yad Vashem were analyzed. The tapes had been made by survivors who attended the 1981 World Gathering of Holocaust Survivors held in Jerusalem.²⁴ From them, it would appear that the survivors preferred to operate independently, irrespective of their income level. Here are some instances:

21. Minnesota Oral History Archives, Jewish Community Relations Council, Minneapolis.

22. Ibid.

23. Rabinowitz, *New Lives*, p. 19. This is actually the only book-length treatment of post-Holocaust survivors that does not focus exclusively on pathology. Well written and insightful as it is, it is, nonetheless, based on a small, non-random group of survivors. It makes no claim to scientific validity but is, instead, written from a journalistic perspective.

24. For more on the attitudes of these people, see William B. Helmreich, "Research Report: Postwar Adaptation of Holocaust Survivors in the U.S.A.," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2, No. 2:307-315.

So we went to Hartford and there was a *landsman* who owned a fruit store that I met. And he was a son of a bitch; he used me up ... He paid me \$42.00 a week. I worked seven weeks. He was a very bad guy ... Then I went to work for myself as a roofer and four years later I got a house that I built for myself.²⁵

So we came to Cleveland ... where my sponsor lived. I got a job raking and cleaning on a golf course ... Then, when the golf season ended I got a job as a plasterer. Then I worked as a cabinetmaker. Twelve years ago I went out on my own in draperies.²⁶

When I came to America in Richmond in 1947 I decided to open up a service station. Since I saw America as a land on wheels I decided the future for service station is good. Then I went into the auto parts business. Now I have two stores and 28 people working for me.²⁷

In 1981 the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies/United Jewish Appeal, under the direction of the sociologists Paul Ritterband and Steven M. Cohen, conducted the largest survey, so far, of Diaspora Jewry. Included in the sample are 112 Holocaust survivors plus about 100 respondents whose spouses were survivors, making it one of the only truly random, nonclinical samples of such individuals.

One question that is of interest is the income level of survivors. A popular stereotype about survivors, among both Jews and Gentiles, is that they have done very well financially when compared to other Jews. Statistics show that this is not the case. However, when one considers the disadvantages which so many survivors had to overcome, their income level assumes even greater significance.

Giving in America

A comparison of contributions to charity, irrespective of its Jewish or non-Jewish nature, between survivors and non-survivors, revealed no significant differences among those who contribute less than \$2000 a year. However, among those who donated more than \$2,000 annually, survivors outnumbered non-survivors by better than two to one. The differences between the two groups are even more interesting when one examines specific charities. Survivors are more likely to contribute to the Red Cross than are non-survivors, but less likely to give to other medical causes. Why this is so is a matter of speculation. Survivors are less likely than non-survivors to support the arts and other cultural activities. Perhaps this is because the survivors are less assimilated and, hence, less apt to give to non-Jewish activities. There is some support for this hypothesis when we evaluate their contributions to Jewish causes. Both groups contribute equally to the United Jewish Appeal, but their patterns of giving diverge sharply when other Jewish causes

25. Abraham Jacobowski, *Yad Vashem Archives* (YV), 26a.

26. Jacob Hennenberg, YV, 195a.

27. Israel Ipson, YV, 371.

are considered. Survivors are considerably more likely to give money to other, Israel-related causes than are non-survivors. They are also more than twice as likely to contribute to local Jewish schools. In part, this may be due to their overrepresentation among the Orthodox segment of the Jewish population. Still, this cannot be the only reason, since the survivors give substantially more than do non-survivors to Jewish causes of all types.²⁸

The qualitative research on this question supports the figures given here. The oral histories on file at the American Jewish Committee²⁹ and the Yad Vashem tapes contain many statements about the pride felt by the survivors regarding their financial support of Jewish causes and, in particular, Israel. Writing about the work of the immigrant organization in Vineland, New Jersey, known as the Jewish Poultry Farmer's Association (JPFA), one observer noted:

Who would think of a UJA Drive or a JNF Drive without participation of the JPFA. They not only contributed their proportionate share of money in these drives, but banded manpower, leg work and officers to further the projects.³⁰

Involvement in Communal Life

In an article that appeared in *Commentary* in 1955, Nathan Glazer discussed at length the Jewish revival in America. The Holocaust and Zionism were, in his view, unimportant factors in this revival, especially when compared to Jewish migration to the suburbs.³¹ There is evidence, however, that, even in the 1950s, Holocaust survivors were involved in Jewish affairs, especially with respect to Israel and the Holocaust. Their involvement in fund-raising for Jewish charities in Baltimore was widely praised by community leaders there who cited it as "an exemplary display of their integration into the community . . . They have done honor unto Baltimore and honor unto themselves."³²

The farming communities in which the survivors settled, because they were insular and cohesive, enable us to assess more fully the contributions of the immigrants. In some of the South Jersey locales, like Vineland, the Jews had already been there for some time. In others, like Danielson, Connecticut, they founded new communities. In both instances, the survivors brought with them a desire to preserve Jewish culture and in so doing they raised the level of Jewish consciousness

28. A full assessment of the extent of survivors' contributions in relation to their income is currently under way.

29. Wiener Oral History Collection.

30. I. Harry Levin, "Vineland — A Haven for Refugees," *The Jewish Poultry Farmers Association of South Jersey, 10th Anniversary Journal*, 1962:5.

31. Nathan Glazer, "The Jewish Revival in America: I," *Commentary* 20 No. 6 (December 1955):493-499.

32. "Baltimore Newcomers Group Participates in Campaign," *Rescue*, (April-May 1951):5.

to new heights. In some cases, the influx of refugees prevented these communities from dying out entirely, especially in California.³³

Here was a real Yiddish life transplanted from Eastern Europe to our shores. Many of our so-called "Native American Jews" had almost forgotten what a Yiddish word was, a Jewish play, a Yiddish concert. The group activities from the very beginning created actually a new Yiddish culture era in Vineland Jewish history . . . Some are actively engaged in the work of the Poale Zion, the General Zionist group, Mizrahi, and Hadassah . . . Their cultural activities in celebrating our Jewish holidays are something to talk about. It brings back that nostalgic feeling . . . , the real side of Jewish life.³⁴

There is a perception that interest in commemorating the Holocaust really began to grow after the Eichmann trial. Perhaps; but it is equally clear that the survivors themselves were memorializing the Holocaust almost from the time they arrived in the United States. In an article that appeared in *Der Yiddisher Farmer*, the writer speaks about guilt feelings resulting from leading a happy, contented life while others are dead. Readers are reminded that the Holocaust martyrs had exhorted their fellow Jews: "Don't forget us! Tell the world! Take revenge."³⁵

The activities of these communities have been preserved through journals and books written about them, but more research needs to be done on the survivor communities elsewhere. Still, there is no reason to believe that survivors living in New York and in other parts of the country were any less vigilant in remembering the past. Interviews now being done suggest that it was through the *landsmannschaften* that the Holocaust experiences were shared and recalled. All of the major cities in the United States with substantial survivor populations had "New-comer" organizations, in addition to the *landsmannschaften*, and these served as bridges between the old culture and the new.³⁶ In 1955, for example, over 300 persons attended a Warsaw Ghetto memorial service at the YMHA Club in Newark, New Jersey. That city was home to an organization founded May 21, 1955 and known as the Association of European Refugees of New Jersey. Its goals included support for Israel, Jewish education, recreational activities, and charitable causes.

33. For more information on this process, see Jacob M. Maze, "Petaluma — Oldest Jewish Farm Settlement in California," *The Jewish Farmer*, (September 1957):121; Benjamin Miller, "Jewish Farmers in Connecticut," *The Jewish Farmer*, (May 1958):77-81; Shlomo Zecktsler, "Der Neier Yiddisher Yishuv in Danielson, Connecticut" (The New Jewish Settlement in Danielson, Connecticut), *Der Yiddisher Farmer*, (May 1958):96 (Yiddish); Shaul Yurista, "Erste Schritt" (First Steps), *The Jewish Poultry Farmers Association of South Jersey, 10th Anniversary Journal*, 1962:47 (Yiddish).

34. Levin, *Vineland*, 1962.

35. Breina Goldman, "Zum 14ter Yizkor Tog Nuch Unzere Kedoishim" (On the 14th Remembrance Day of Our Martyrs), *Der Yiddisher Farmer*, (June 1957):90 (Yiddish).

36. Interview with Willie Herskovits, December 30, 1987; also, correspondence with Professor Hannah Kliger who is conducting research on *landsmannschaften* in the United States.

It also organized trips to the Farband Unser Camp in Highland Mills, New York, where boating and swimming were available. Kosher food was served and theatrical performances were presented.³⁷ All of this suggests a rich cultural life that undoubtedly had a profound effect on other members of the larger Jewish communities in which they lived.

Strong support for Israel is another characteristic that distinguishes the survivor community and this must be seen in the context of general Jewish support for Israel among American Jews. Fifty percent of American Jews do not contribute money to Israel, and at least three in five Jews have never visited Israel.³⁸ Statistics demonstrate conclusively that, even in New York, where Jewish support for Israel has traditionally been quite strong, the involvement of survivors is greater than that of the average New York Jewish resident. Survivors are also far more likely to have visited Israel than non-survivors, but one visit is not especially significant, it can be argued, because, for the most part, it does not represent a real commitment. People may go to celebrate a child's *bar* or *bat mizvah*; they may travel to Israel as part of an organization-sponsored activity. True commitment can more readily be judged when people visit the country more than once. Survivors are *more than three times as likely* as non-survivors to have visited Israel at least twice. This suggests a continuing and deeply felt involvement with the State. It can be safely assumed that such individuals are also likely to be more involved with Israel-related activities in the United States and that they make contributions in varying ways toward enriching Jewish life. Although the analysis is still incomplete, available data seem to indicate that survivors are considerably more apt to belong to Jewish organizations of all sorts than are non-survivors.³⁹ If so, this would further substantiate the argument that survivors have had a major impact on Jewish life in America.

The Children of Survivors

A community is often measured by what happens to its children. Do they identify with the culture? How successful are they in their own lives? As in the case of survivor studies, much of the literature has focused on pathology.⁴⁰ The validity of these studies in terms of

37. Josef Buttermann, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany and in the United States of America, 1945-1960: A Report* (New York, 1960), available at Yad Vashem.

38. William B. Helmreich, "Misguided Optimism," *Midstream*, (January 1988):31.

39. Based on preliminary results made available through the North American Jewish Data Bank, City University of New York.

40. S. Rustin, *Guilt, Hostility and Jewish Identification Among Adolescent Children of Concentration Camp Survivors*, Unpublished PhD. Dissertation (New York University, 1971); Judith Kestenberg, "Psychoanalytic Contributions to the Problem of Children of Survivors from Nazi Persecution," *Israel Annals of Psychiatry and Related Disciplines*, 10, No. 4

generalizations can be challenged on the grounds that the samples are small, are not random, and are drawn from clinical populations, namely, those who have sought help. In any event, these researchers have rarely dealt with the question of achievement among children of survivors.

One exception to this pattern is the work of Helen Epstein, who, in a report prepared for the American Jewish Committee, notes that 85 percent of the survivors who were interviewed were married, more than half of their children were students, and 23 percent of their children had entered the professions.⁴¹ She estimates that there are about 500,000 children of survivors alive today, and she describes them as largely middle-class and college-educated.⁴²

Until more systematic research is conducted it will be impossible to evaluate fully the contributions of the survivors' children, but it can be stated that, simply by having children, the survivors contributed to the continuity of the Jewish community. They did not take the position that the world was too horrible a place in which to raise children. Commenting on this, Steven Riskin, a rabbi currently living in Israel, said: "What makes Jews remarkable is not that they believe in God after Auschwitz, but that they have children after Auschwitz; that they affirm life and the future."⁴³ Generally speaking, when survivors are asked what achievement they take the greatest pride in, they reply: "My children [and grandchildren]."

The psychological literature discusses at great length the various problems that can, and do, afflict children of survivors. Included in these are anxiety, depression, hostility, and shame. Some children learn to cope with these feelings better than others, but the experiences of the parents affect almost all children in one way or another. In a recent novel, Barbara Finkelstein discusses the problem with great insight. She notes that there exists a paradox in that the survivors are frequently seen by their children as all-powerful, even indestructible, people who "made it through hell," notwithstanding the nightmares and paranoia from which they subsequently suffered. What is important is that *they made it*. On the other hand, in their ill-fitting clothes, short physical stature, foreign accents, and discomfort as immigrants to a new culture, they seem frail and weak. "How did these *schleppers* ever make it?," wonders the child of such a family. "Were they once strong and self-confident?"⁴⁴ For a child searching for a role model, these are difficult matters to sort out. And, yet, it is precisely because children of survivors

(1972):311-325; Hillel Klein. "Families of Survivors in the Kibbutz: Psychological Studies," in H. Krystal and W. Niederland, eds. *Psychic Traumatization* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971).

41. Epstein, *Study in American Pluralism*, pp. 11-12.

42. Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1980), pp. 178-179.

43. Address at *Israel Center*, Jerusalem, April 25, 1987.

44. Barbara Finkelstein, *Summer Long-a-Coming* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 247.

must carry such burdens with them that they have the opportunity, through heightened sensitivity and awareness, to make others understand such issues. Future studies will more properly evaluate the processes and dynamics that are involved here. In the meantime, it is possible to comment on the effect that the survivors themselves have had on making the larger society aware of their own unique experiences.

A Moral Legacy

Until now we have been speaking of the effect of the survivor on the Jewish community, but, with respect to the issue of morality and values, the survivors' impact extends to the Christian community also. Every time that survivors speak to classes of students or participate in a community forum, they contribute to an awareness of the meaning of the Holocaust. No one has as yet counted the number of such events, but there have surely been thousands of them. Every such encounter, every life touched, represents a contribution made by the survivors towards ensuring that a Holocaust will not happen again. It is both their self-imposed duty and their opportunity to serve as the world's conscience as long as they are alive and, to the degree that they succeed in this endeavor, they affect the course of history.

Inasmuch as the survivors tend to see everything through the prism of their unique background, they influence society's thinking in other ways, too. The analysis of the Yad Vashem tapes reveals a heightened concern for the rights of *all* minorities among the survivors. One says:

We live in a small world. We cannot afford to let anyone suffer. When the air is destroyed we all breathe it . . . if the Jewish people or any other people are treated badly, we are all in for a bad time. If anything happens to one group of people, all the other minorities should stand up for them.⁴⁵

Whether this feeling is true of survivors in general awaits further study. Still, wherever and whenever such views are expressed, they demonstrate an ability to extrapolate from personal experiences in a way that enhances the general good.

Other ways of thinking predicated on Holocaust experiences also emerge in the Yad Vashem tapes. One woman expressed her sympathy for both the hostages in Iran and the returning Vietnam War veterans in this way: "I feel a lot for the Vietnam soldiers. When I came back from the war, nobody cared if I lived or died."⁴⁶ Along with several others, she expressed the deep fears that the Watergate trials aroused:

I watched Watergate. It's almost identical to Germany. Haldeman and Erlichman. They were of German descent. It's all loyalty. They say you have to lie. And the hush money. That was always going on in Germany.

45. Sam Harris, YV, 10; Rabinowitz, *New Lives*, p. 108.

46. Rose Murra, YV, 317.

THE IMPACT OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS : 27

I didn't eat; I didn't sleep. I was sitting at the TV. And I used to sit and cry. Nixon brought back all the Germans to me.⁴⁷

No studies have yet been done on political participation among survivors, though currently there is one Congressman who is a survivor, Tom Lantos of California, while Sam Gejdenson of Connecticut is a child of a survivor. What is clear, however, is that the survivors have a highly favorable attitude toward America. The respondent cited above asserted that, despite her apprehensions, the fact that the Watergate burglars had been held accountable proved that America was a good country. Other researchers and writers have similarly commented on the appreciation that survivors have for the United States as a land that accepted them into its midst.⁴⁸ Interviews done so far by this researcher suggest that the majority of them vote in elections and that they do so because of an acute awareness of what it means to have such rights denied and abrogated.

In sum, it is apparent that survivors have made contributions in a number of areas. By settling in many different communities they have made certain that their influence will be felt throughout the country. They have entered a wide variety of occupations and professions and, despite the disadvantages of their circumstances, have managed to do quite well. A large proportion of them seem to have been self-employed. The survivors have also shown themselves to be quite generous in terms of charity, especially for Jewish causes, and their involvement with the State of Israel and other Jewish concerns has been uniformly high. Their children have also done well, although more research needs to be done on this question. Finally, the survivors have contributed in a tangible way to raising the level of moral consciousness in this country and, one can assume, everywhere else, too.

How many of them have actually spoken about their experiences to others is not so important. What is significant is that, because of what they represent when they do good, they can have an enormous effect on others that is totally out of proportion to their numbers. To the extent that they have succeeded in doing so, it can be said that theirs is a message of hope and renewal, a message that, even after one has experienced terrible trauma and suffering, it is still possible to remain human — and humane.

47. Ibid.

48. See Doris Kirschmann and Sylvia Savin, "Refugee Adjustment — Five Years Later," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, 30 (Winter 1953):200; Rabinowitz, *New Lives*, p. 139; Epstein, *Study in American Pluralism*, p.3; G. R. Leon, et al, "Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Children: Current Status and Adjustment," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 41 (1981):503-516.

“Out of the Ghetto”: Integrating the Study of Jewish Women into the Study of “The Jews”

SHULAMIT MAGNUS

JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY COULD DO WITH a new *Prolegomenon to the History of the Jews*. Such a work would recognize that, for all of our impressive studies of Jewish society and culture, an enormous area of inquiry has not been touched. More, its very existence has barely been acknowledged. That area concerns half of Jewish society in all classes and countries throughout the ages: women.

The task for Jewish historians is two-fold. It is essential, first, to uncover the historical experience of Jewish women, about which remarkably little is known. Yet it would not be enough merely to create another subspecialty in Judaic studies, “Jewish women’s history.” Traditional conceptions of Jewish history must be thoroughly reshaped to include the historical reality of women. What has been said for historical writing as a whole applies equally to Jewish historiography: “Women’s history asks for a paradigm shift.” The goal, as Gerda Lerner notes, is not “compensatory history,” much less the history of “women worthies.” It is a fundamental revamping of the categories with which we conceptualize the past.¹

As a teacher of Jewish history and of Jewish women’s history — they have been separate courses, as if they were not the same subject — I have been disturbed by the bifurcation of the material, and by the perpetuation, in this manner, of the fallacy that there *is* Jewish history without the history of Jewish women. There are now whole course guides to Jewish women’s studies and that is good, to be sure. But if all that this does is create an historiographical *mehizah* which permits “business as usual” on the other side of the fence, scholars of Jewish women’s history will only have perpetrated the ghettoization, hence the trivialization, of the field. Our knowledge must be expanded and deepened, but the fruits of our research must also be taken out of the ghetto and introduced into the mainstream. They must recast what we mean by “mainstream.”

1. Gerda Lerner, “The Challenge of Women’s History,” in her *The Majority Finds Its Past, Placing Women in History* (New York, 1979), p. 180; Ibid., “Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges,” p. 145.

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The historical experience of Jewish women has been distorted in two major ways. First, the greatest distortion: it has been ignored, and thus has been denied. Most accounts of the Jewish community, Jewish economic activities, religious movements, personal piety, and folk religion, either omit mention of girls and women or include them in the most marginal way. The history of Jewish men and their institutions, and of an elite minority at that, has been taken for the history of the whole society. Jewish religious history, to cite one area, has been conceived in a way which effaces the existence of women. Consider the main chapters of this history as it is traditionally written: the emergence of rabbinic Judaism in Palestine and Babylonia: of *Hasidei Ashkenaz* and Jewish philosophy in the medieval period: of Lurianic kabbalah, Hasidism, Reform Judaism, and neo-Orthodoxy in the modern period. What do we know of women and their religious lives and activities in relation to, or apart from, any of these movements?

Yet women, of course, were half of Jewish society. It is historically inaccurate to present a picture of "Jewish religious life" in any period or place which does not seek out the reality of half of the Jews. Religious historians, in particular, must be attentive to questions of gender, since gender was a central organizing principle in religious life. This does not mean that women were hermetically sealed off from religious developments in the male Jewish world; they were not. But the question of their relationship to these developments must truly be asked. Just as Joan Kelly, a Renaissance historian and an historian of women, has asked, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," so Jewish historians must ask, "Did Jewish Women Have a Talmudic era?," a "Golden Age in Spain?" a "Religious Awakening in Hasidism?"²

To take but one of these epochs: the Talmudic era could not have meant the same things to women and men if by "Talmudic era" we signify the triumph of rabbinic learning and influence. Women were neither rabbis nor disciples of rabbis, and if some of them, perhaps many, were nonetheless learned and pious, they were not the ones whom the members of the Knesset Hagedolah had in mind when it enjoined, "Raise up many pupils," nor the ones that the *gemara* in Sanhedrin had in mind when it recorded, in the name of Rav, "Anyone who keeps the Law from a pupil, it is as if he has stolen from the inheritance of his fathers . . ."³ On the contrary. The growing professionalization of the rabbinate in the centuries after the destruction of the second Temple, which E. E. Urbach chronicles, may have made it more difficult for women to gain access to religious learning. It cer-

2. Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 19-50.

3. Quoted in Shmuel Safrai, "Elementary Education, Its Religious and Social Significance in the Talmudic Period," in *Jewish Society Through the Ages*, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson and S. Ettinger (New York, 1973), p. 159.

tainly created, or at least solidified, a whole prestige class from which women, by definition, were excluded.

It is not true, as Urbach asserts, that the constitution of the Talmudical academy was "democratic" because the academy's doors "remained open to rich and poor alike."⁴ If the academy did not discriminate on the basis of class, it certainly did so on the basis of gender. If the Talmudic era was one in which gender differences were accentuated, specifically around rabbinic learning, then that era has a completely different signification from the one usually imparted, which depicts ever broadening rabbinic popularity and influence achieved by democratization. This whole question remains to be investigated, but it suggests how women's history may modify our conception of Jewish history as a whole.

Embodied in the question, "Did Jewish Women Have A Talmudic Era?" and in its counterparts for other periods of Jewish history, is one of the larger methodological issues of women's studies: periodization. As would appear obvious, criteria derived from the history of men may be inadequate or inappropriate to the history of women. So long as these criteria are applied dogmatically, as if they were absolutes rather than as derivatives of a particular body of knowledge, women's history cannot exist as a discipline.

Jewish historians should be familiar with this argument. There would be no Jewish history as an academic discipline if Jews had not redefined the criteria which decided what was historically important, or even historically real. So long as warfare, diplomacy, state-building, and a national literature produced on national soil were the criteria for national histories, Jews were said to have had no history. *Wissenschaft des Judentums* became possible only when the criteria for study of the Jews derived from Jewish experience.

Similarly, the criteria for studying Jewish women's history will derive from the actual historical experience of Jewish women. We will have to learn to respect whole categories of inquiry which, until very recently, Jewish historiography has not taken seriously: The Jewish household and family — not of myth and propaganda, but of historical reality; Jewish sexuality — not of the law codes, but of historical reality; the role indoctrination of women and their internalization of, or resistance to, patriarchal values; women's economic function and their actual, as opposed to *de jure*, rights and disabilities.

Jewish women's history cannot be periodized according to great literary productions, since women were largely barred from active participation in such work. But this does not mean that they had no positive historical reality, any more than it meant that Jews, as a whole, had no positive historical reality when they lacked a state and armies. Ar-

4. Urbach, "The Talmudic Sage-Character and Authority," *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

ticulate, conscious expressions of Jewish identity were not the only ones which existed. Indeed, most Jews, male as well as female, were not engaged in the production, or even the sustained study, of Judaica, yet these were the Jews of history. To uncover women's reality we must look at inarticulate but pervasive and powerful expressions of Jewish identity as expressed in ritual observances, child-rearing and healing practices, and in official and unofficial community service. From these behaviors we may be able to make deductions about the attitudes and beliefs of women.⁵

The sources for the study of Jewish women, barring some new cache on the scale of the Cairo Geniza, are largely the sources that we already have. What will change are the questions which we ask of them. We will read rabbinic sources not for prescriptive formulae, to derive the ideal, mythologized "Jewish Woman" of contemporary propaganda, but in order to uncover social reality.⁶ The Talmud and its commentaries and, certainly, the vast corpus of responsa literature, are a treasure trove waiting to be mined by those who possess both competency in rabbinics and a commitment to using gender as a prime category of analysis.

Other sources have long existed but have not been studied because they pertain "only" to women. A veil of embarrassment and contempt hangs over them, reminiscent of the veil which hung over kabbalistic works until Gershom Scholem redeemed them from irrelevance and transformed our whole view of Judaism in the process.

Chava Weissler has begun to uncover the religious world of Ashkenazic women because she paid sustained scholarly attention to *Tehines*, devotional literature used extensively by women, some of which may also have been composed by women. Marion Kaplan, in her work on the *Jüdischer Frauenbund*, has shown that in the same years when Jews were fighting for full civil equality in German society, Jewish women

5. Women *did* have official appointments and functions in traditional Jewish communities. See for example, Isaac Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772-1844* (New York, 1943), pp. 112-115, 147, 169, on the status of midwives, *zogerkes* (female cantors for women worshippers), and women's burial societies.

6. Contemporary writers on the "Jewish Woman" obviously do not realize the absurdity, or the offensiveness, of posing such an historical type. The typology, in any case, derives not from dispassionate, scholarly observation, but from prior ideological commitments. Equally offensive is the appellation "Jewess" — which implies, of course, that "Jews" are men. It should be as inconceivable to use this term as it would be to refer to Christian women as "Christianesses." I would suggest that the term "Jews" be used for the group as a whole, and "Jewish men" and "Jewish women," respectively, when these are the subjects of discussion.

It should be emphasized that valuable studies could be done of the idealized images of both "the Jewish Woman" and "the Jewish Man" in Jewish writings. The goal would be to explore how, and to what ends, traditional, and modern, Jewish societies patterned sex role differences, and the times and places (such as our own) in which such differences are particularly accentuated and exalted.

had to fight a civil rights battle within the Jewish community for the right to vote, hold communal office or have a voice in running the communal institutions that their volunteer labor and taxes sustained. Using family memoirs, Kaplan has also raised some very important questions about a possible gender differential in the rate of Jewish acculturation and assimilation in modern Germany, suggesting that women may have remained bound to traditional outlook and behavior longer than did men.⁷

All of this is part of the *Jewish* story. These are chapters in Jewish piety, Jewish political history, the Jewish passage from traditionalism to modernity. Our notions of Jewish spirituality and Jewish modernity must be modified accordingly.

Those for whom women's studies are not an area of original research still have an obligation to teach in a way that acknowledges the existence of women and grapples with their experience. There are plenty of secondary sources and primary sources in translation which, though not intended for this purpose, can nevertheless be used to this end.

For example: a session in my women's history course, devoted to "The Other Side of Myth in Ashkenazic, Italian and Mediterranean Island Jewries," explored a broad range of topics in the lives of medieval Jewish women. These were: "Economic Power and Legal Status, Modest and Immodest Dress, Premarital Sex, Marriage, Divorce, Wife Beating and Abandonment." Assigned reading were classic secondary works on medieval Jewry and collections of translated responsa, communal ordinances, ethical wills and letters: Louis Finkelstein's *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages*; Jacob Marcus' *The Jew in the Medieval World*; Irving Agus' *The Heroic Age of Franco-German Jewry*; Franz Kobler's *Letters of the Jews Through the Ages*, and Curt Leviant's *Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature*. A similar session on Jewish women's realities in an Islamic domain was based on volume three of S.D. Goitein's masterly, pioneering work, *A Mediterranean Society: The Family*. Such investigations

7. Chava Weissler, "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazic Women," in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality From the Sixteenth Century Revival to the Present*, II (New York, 1987), pp. 245-275; "The Living and The Dead: Ashkenazic Family Relations in the Light of Hebrew and Yiddish Cemetery Prayers," paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, December, 1986; "The Religion of Traditional Ashkenazic Women: Some Methodological Issues," *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1987): 73-94; "Women in Paradise," *Tikkun*, 2, No. 2 (April-May, 1987): 43-46 and 117-120; "Traditional Yiddish Literature: A Source for the Study of Women's Religious Lives," The Jacob Pat Memorial Lecture, Harvard College Library, 1987; "Images of the Matriarchs in Yiddish Supplicatory Prayers," *Bulletin of the Center for the Study of World Religions* 14, No. 1 (1988), pp.45-51; also see, Marion Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany* (Westport, Conn., 1979); "Priestess and Hausfrau: Women and Tradition in the German-Jewish Family," in Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman, eds., *The Jewish Family, Myths and Reality* (New York, London, 1986), pp. 62-81.

should not be confined to specialized courses on women but should be integrated into the study of medieval Jewish society as a whole.

Sometimes I am confronted with a blank, when no secondary works are available from which to construct anything about the historical reality of women. I then use, as object lessons in the pitfalls of patriarchal historiography, works which ignore the existence of women and, nonetheless, draw huge generalizations about Jewish society which would not be sustainable if women had been noticed.

The examples of this type of writing are more plentiful than we would wish, but take one example: an article by Shmuel Safrai entitled "Elementary Education in the Talmudic Period."⁸ Safrai's main thesis is that elementary education increased enormously in the talmudic period as part of a concerted program to spread rabbinic learning. The author, who takes obvious pride in the democratization of Jewish learning, contrasts the Jewish elementary school system, which targeted the rural masses, with that of the Hellenistic cities, where education was the preserve of the urban elite. Unlike the latter, he writes, "the Jewish school . . . was intended for *all the children* as Jewish law obligated every father and every settlement to attend to the education of *the children*" (my emphasis). The entire article assumes the identity of "child" and "son," and of "parent" and "father," asserting, "Education and teaching which were considered obligatory for everyone, included two main stages: reading substantial sections of Scripture, and secondly the Oral Law . . ."⁹

The article utterly ignores the existence of girls and women, daughters and mothers. Thus, Safrai is not confronted with the fundamental challenge to his thesis of the democratization of education which is embodied in the reality that the educational system excluded half of the population. Since Safrai's article does not recognize the historical reality of women, it does not explore the extent to which women may have acquired rabbinic learning from the extensive public and synagogue preaching that rabbis did, an activity which he justly evaluated as a major public educational device. His value-laden conclusion is remarkable for the vast social reality that it overlooks:

. . . there can be no doubt . . ., [he says], that the spread of education [in the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods] served as one of the important causes for the disappearance of the *Am Haaretz* [ignoramus] as a distinctive group, and created a feeling of social and spiritual equality among *all* sectors of the people (my emphasis).

Safrai could not have come to that conclusion if he had used gender as well as class as a category of analysis. Students of the talmudic period, and not just students in specialized women's history courses, need to be made aware of that. Some of them, one would hope, would be

8. As cited above, note 3.

9. Ibid., pp. 148 and 151.

spurred to explore the education of girls and women in the talmudic period and their relationship to the burgeoning talmudic enterprise.¹⁰

While we await the revision of Jewish historiography which will come after, the spadework of Jewish women's history has been done, teachers of any period of Jewish history must still make women a central focus of inquiry. If questions cannot be answered, they must at least be asked. I would suggest that one session of any course on Jewish history be devoted to questions of male bias in the primary and secondary sources, and to readings in the methodology of women's history. Once this is done, class discussions can always include women even if they are not explicitly mentioned in the sources, or are presented only as an aside, or as stereotypes.

Jewish women's history can be distorted not only by being ignored, but, also, in the ways in which it is treated. One of the most common means of distortion is mythologization for propagandistic purposes. This is a theme in its own right which will not be explored here. Suffice it to say that the call for Jewish women's history is not a call for yet more studies of the status of women in rabbinic law. The depths of that particular area of inquiry may well not yet have been plumbed, but that is a subdivision of rabbinics; it is not women's history. Needless to say, apologetics for the status of women in rabbinic law are neither rabbinics nor women's history.

When students of Jewish women's history use rabbinic sources, they will seek to illuminate not the theoretical status of women in rabbinic law, but their actual status in traditional Jewish societies. A feminist approach would look beyond discrete rights and disabilities to an analysis of the structure and function of gender differentiation and its indoctrination and assimilation in society. Caution is in order, however, against writing which would limit itself to documenting and analyzing the oppression of women. The history of Jewish women is no more synonymous with the experience of misogynistic prejudice than is Jewish history, as a whole, synonymous with the experience of anti-Semitic prejudice. Outside prejudice and its internalization are, in both cases, an essential part of the story, but not its totality. If women were portrayed solely as victims that, too, would be a grievous distortion of history.

To a certain extent, the argument for a different set of questions to unearth the historical reality of women is the argument for the history of non-elites in general. But social history will not contribute to our knowledge about Jewish women unless it uses gender as well as class

10. Elsewhere, Safrai does evidence interest in the realities of women's religious education and practice. See his "Women Learned in Torah in the Period of the Mishnah and the Talmud," (Hebrew), *Mahanayim*, 98 (1965): 58-59; "Was There a Women's Section in the Synagogue in Antiquity?" (Hebrew), in his *The Land of Israel and Its Scholars in the Mishnaic and Talmudic Period* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 94-104.

as a category of analysis, and makes women a central focus of inquiry. Not even studies of marriage and the family in the Jewish community necessarily illuminate women's realities.

To offer a blatant example: David Biale has written a number of articles on Jewish matchmaking and marriage patterns in Eastern Europe in early modernity, and on the critique levelled against these patterns by the *haskalah*. Although the focus is promising, the perspective of the articles is entirely male; more than that, sexist. Biale's sources are rabbinic responsa and the memoirs and fiction writings of *maskilim* traumatized by arranged child marriages. He does not consider the trauma of the child brides, even via historical empathy, and sometimes writes with appalling insensitivity of the predicament of these girls.

In an article entitled, "Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment," Biale cites the case of a "12-year old boy married to a girl of the same age and forced by family pressure to have sex with her."¹¹ Note that the focus is on the boy, rather than on the couple, much less the girl, who was equally forced to have sex with her husband. Biale goes on to report from the responsum, which is his source, that the children were interrupted during intercourse by an overanxious family member, and refused to go near each other thereafter. The boy subsequently ran away. Of this Biale writes: "Such a case eloquently conveys the pathos and humiliation that must have made the boy run away from his in-laws's home." He does not consider the pathos and humiliation of the girl who remained, although she had become an *agunah* ("chained woman," unable to remarry), whose predicament, indeed, had occasioned the responsum.¹²

Elsewhere in the same article, Biale writes with crudity of a fascinating case from the nineteenth century responsa literature of a young town girl who comes to live with her husband's family in the countryside. Disconsolate at leaving her family and lonely in the rural setting, she was seduced by her father-in-law while her husband was off at school. "Unfortunately," Biale laments, "no such *racey tale* can be found in the reverse situation of the young *maskilim*," who are his primary interest. (my emphasis). To call an instance of sexual molestation and incest

11. "Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment," in Cohen and Hyman, p. 48. A revised version of the article appeared in *Polin*, I (1986): 49-67, under the title "Eros and Enlightenment: Love Against Marriage in the East European Jewish Enlightenment." The cited passage appears on pp. 51-52.

12. Biale could legitimately choose to limit his perspective to the experience of boys and men, but this should be made explicit in the title and in the body of the text. "Enlightenment" is too vague a term for this purpose, since it can refer to a period in Jewish history and not just to the (male) leaders of the *Haskalah* movement. Since his article cites responsa literature of the period, Biale himself uses the term "Enlightenment" broadly — in which case, his exclusive focus on males is not justified. More importantly, readers of this work must realize that they are learning about "Childhood," "Marriage" and "the Family" from a purely male perspective.

a “racy tale” is well beyond the bounds of propriety. To dismiss it because it “only” involved the girl, compounds the offense.¹³

In short — what the Jewish historical profession needs is massive consciousness training so that we know half a story when we see it, and actively seek out the whole. It will be the beginning of an inclusive history of the Jews.

13. Gershon Hundert, by contrast, whose article “Approaches to the History of the Jewish Family in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania”, also appears in Cohen, Hyman, pp.17-28, is aware of the need for attention to the experience of women. So is Immanuel Etkes in his methodologically sophisticated, thought-provoking, “Family and The Study of Torah Among Lithuanian Talmudist Circles in the Nineteenth Century.” (Hebrew), *Zion*, 51, No. 1 (1986): 87-106.

We deeply mourn the passing of our colleague on the Board
of Contributing Editors of JUDAISM,

Salo Wittmayer Baron, ז"ל

His accomplishments as a historian are unsurpassed.

יהי זכרו ברוך

Conflicting Conclusions: The Hatred of Isaac and Ishmael

DAVID J. ZUCKER

Prologue

THE CURRENT CONFLICT THAT IS RAGING IN Israel between the Palestinians and the Israeli government is but one aspect of the wider tensions between Israel and her Arab neighbors. In a broad sense, the present antagonists see themselves, and are seen, as the modern descendants of the Patriarch Abraham. Israel is the child of Abraham and Sarah through Isaac. The Arabs understand their descent through Abraham's first born son, Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar. The current conflict, therefore, is understood by some as having still another dimension, it being but the latest "family feud" over the inheritance of Abraham.¹

The difficulty with this analysis is that it places Isaac and Ishmael into a mythic stance. They take on a sense of far more than who they were. Indeed, in this metamorphosis, Abraham's sons are portrayed as antagonists, a relationship which may not be supported by the Bible itself.

This article considers these two half-brothers. Was there conflict? If so, was it a continuing confrontation, or were they able to work out a reconciliation? What does the Bible say? How did the later traditional sources understand their association? Do modern Biblical commentaries offer any other insights?

1. The Biblical setting

There are only two or three basic episodes where one finds Ishmael and Isaac mentioned together: Genesis 17:18 ff.; Genesis 21:9 ff.; and Genesis 25:7 ff.² *Despite the commonly perceived notion that there are deep and abiding tensions between the brothers, on the face of it, nothing in the text would seem to indicate this conflict. In Genesis 17, Isaac is not even born. Furthermore, there is no suggestion that Ishmael was there to hear God's words*

1. *Kur'an, Surah 6.86*; cf. n. 906. *The Glorious Kur'an*, translation and commentary by Abdallah Yousuf Ali (place, publisher and date not listed); Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), p. 208.

2. a) In Genesis 17:18 ff. Abraham has just been told by God that he would have a son by Sarah. He is incredulous, and asks if this is possible. Then Abraham says: "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor (Gen. 17:18). God replies that even though the main covenant will be through (yet-to-be-born) Isaac, because Abraham has so asked, God will "bless" Ishmael and "will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous" (Gen. 17:20).

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to Abraham. In Genesis 21, Ishmael, presumably in his mid-teen years, is merely playing.³ In Genesis 25, the brothers come together in the mutual bond of burying their father.

2. *Ishmael, the “wild ass” of a man*

Ishmael's negative reputation was not manufactured totally out of whole cloth. In Genesis 16:11 ff., Hagar is told that she is pregnant and that her son, to be named Ishmael, would be a “wild ass of a man,” that his hand would be against everyone, and that everyone's hand would be against him. Nonetheless, there is no Biblical proof that there was specific tension between the brothers Isaac and Ishmael. This notion of *ongoing deep fraternal conflict* — and, more specifically, a one-sided conflict: that of Ishmael (and his descendants, the Ishmaelites) toward Isaac (and *his* descendants), reflects a later “rewriting” of what the Bible has to say.⁴

3. *The traditional commentators: a negative reaction*

For the classical rabbinic commentators, as for Muslims, Ishmaelites are synonymous with Arabs, just as Esau is equated with Rome.⁵ The nor-

b) Genesis 21:9 ff. Some time after Isaac was weaned, Sarah sees Ishmael playing. Already in the next line Sarah demands that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac” (Gen. 21:10).

c) Genesis 25:7 ff. When Abraham dies, Isaac and Ishmael come together and bury him. We then learn a bit about the line of Ishmael, and that his descendants are to be found in a broad range of land, from Egypt north to the area of Asshur.

3. In the MT (Masoretic Text), Isaac is not necessarily even in sight. Yet, the words, “with her son Isaac,” appear in the Septuagint and Vulgate.

4. In Genesis 37, Ishmaelites and Midianites are involved in taking Joseph to Egypt. Ishmael and Midian were either half-brothers or full brothers (depending on Keturah's identity; cf. n. 24). Both were “sent away” (Gen. 21:14 ff.; 25:6) by Abraham. That their descendants would be involved in the fact that Joseph was “sent away” by his brothers (where again a father shows preference for one child over another), is not coincidental. Cf. Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), pp. 42,46 ff.

Another interpretation:

God sent me ahead of you ... God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth ... it was not you who sent me here, but God (Gen. 45:3,7,8). The Ishmaelites/Midianites are not merely “neutral” figures; they are, according to Joseph's explanation, part of God's plan to ensure the survival of the family.

There is some on-going tension with the Midianites. The elders of Midian ally with their counterparts of Moab to try to prevent Israelite settlement (Numbers 22:4 ff.); and Midianite invasions are recorded in Judges 6 and 7. Nonetheless, Moses finds refuge and a father-in-law with Jethro, the Midianite priest (Exodus 2:15 ff.). Cf. articles on “Ishmaelites” and “Midianites” in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (Abingdon: New York and Nashville, 1962-1976) and Judges 8:24 in TANAKH, *The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1985).

5. The problems surrounding the presentation of earlier figures, primarily Biblical (Esau and Haman, but also Antiochus) and ascribing to them a mythic importance is discussed

mal tensions with their Arab or Muslim neighbors, whether in Jerusalem or Hebron, the Galilee or elsewhere, were often expressed with reference to Biblical events.⁶ For example, the medieval classical Jewish commentators Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Ramban, all state that Ishmael's descendants will be troublesome and aggressive. Ramban notes that, after initial successes, in the end they will be defeated. Even earlier, in *Genesis Rabbah* 45.9, Resh Lakish, a 3rd century Amora living in Palestine, commented on Genesis 16:12 and stated that, while others were thieves, Ishmaelites were murderers. Elsewhere in *Midrash Rabbah* we read that Ishmael would sit at the cross-roads and rob and molest passers-by.⁷

God's explanation to Hagar ends on the note that, nonetheless, (wild ass or not), Ishmael "shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen" (Gen. 16:12). As shall be shown below, dwelling alongside one's kin often meant forming alliances, hardly a relationship of continual conflict. Nearly the same phrase (of dwelling nearby his kin) is used directly after the final Ishmael-Isaac encounter, for there it is said that "... the sons of Ishmael ... camped alongside all their kinsmen" (Gen. 25:16-18). The difference between the two sentences is this: in the earlier version the verb is *yishkon* (from *shin-kaf-nun*) and, in the latter, the verb is *nafal* (from *nun-peh-lamed*). Otherwise, the phrases are virtually the same:

(v') *al p'ney kol ehav yishkon*
al p'ney kol ehav nafal

Rashi explains that, in this context, *nafal* (which usually means "fell") is a synonym for *yishkon* and, therefore, *should be understood* as dwell, or settle. Rashi's explanation is supported by Rashbam and the moderns John Skinner, Claus Westermann and Gerhard von Rad, all of whom understand the word in a similar manner.⁸

in Samuel Schafler, "Enemies or Jew-Haters? Reflections on the History of Anti-semitism" in JUDAISM, Vol. 37, No. 3:352-358.

6. Joseph Heinemann has pointed out that the sages "believed that the Bible provided the answer — if not explicitly, then implicitly — to every contemporary problem ... The aggadists do not mean so much to clarify difficult passages in the biblical text as to take a stand on the burning issues of the day, to guide the people." "The Nature of the Aggadah" in Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, eds., *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 49.

7. *Exodus Rabbah* 1.1 Presumably, the detail of having Ishmael sitting at a cross-road means that he was anxious to rob and molest the greatest number of people. Alternately, this may be a subtle reference to the fact that Ishmael was also an idolater, for prominent places on the highway were often the site of pagan shrines (cf. Gen. 38:14).

8. John Skinner, *Genesis, The International Critical Commentary*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930), p. 354; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, tr. John J. Scullion, S.J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), p. 394; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis*, tr. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 261. Cf. George W. Coats, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 175.

Cf. *nafal* as "settle," in the 1917 Jewish Publication Society translation, the *New English Bible* (hereafter, NEB), and the Revised Standard Version (hereafter RSV). The King James version (hereafter KJV) and the Presbyterian Knox Bibles (hereafter Knox) trans-

Traditionally, at least in the classical Rabbinic texts, a very different explanation is given to the verb *nafal*. In *Genesis Rabbah*, in two different passages, the point is made that Ishmael “fell” upon his kinsmen. As long as Abraham was alive, Ishmael “dwelled” (Gen. 16:12), but, once the Patriarch died, Ishmael “fell” (Gen. 25:18). The same section says that Ishmael stretched his hand out against the Temple, and that Ishmael will be denied the World to Come.⁹ This negative understanding of *nafal*, moreover, is supported in no uncertain terms by Ephraim Speiser in his commentary on Genesis in the Anchor Bible series. There he translates the line in *Genesis* 25:18 as “each made forays against his various kinsmen,” and states specifically that the sense of the phrase is “in disregard, to the detriment of.”¹⁰

4. *At what was Ishmael playing?*

Ishmael's reputation was further damaged, at least in the writings of classical Jewish sources, by their interpretation of his actions either at, or just after, the feast that was hosted by Abraham when Isaac was weaned. The (Masoretic) text in *Genesis* 21:9 says: “Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham *playing*.” Immediately thereafter Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael be expelled from Abraham's encampment. Whether to defend Sarah's harsh request, or to justify the concept of the Ishmael/Isaac conflict, the verb used here, *mezahek* (*mem-zade-het-kuf*) was often explained in a negative light. Rashi, reflecting *Genesis Rabbah* (though he does not mention the reference), suggests that the word in this context is akin to either idolatry, immorality or even murder.

The classical midrashim on this verse certainly cast Ishmael in a negative light. In *Genesis Rabbah* 53.11, a catalog of possible sins is listed: immorality, idolatry, murder, and mockery.¹¹ In Christian tradition, the

late *nafal* as “died,” indicating that Ishmael died in the presence of, or with all of his kindred about him. This notion is also supported by Ibn Ezra's comment on this verse. Everett Fox likewise suggests a “neutral” translation, but notes that others “interpret negatively.” Everett Fox, *In the Beginning: A New English Rendition of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1983), p. 96.

9. *Genesis Rabbah* 45.9 and 62.5

10. Speiser, 188. N.B. It is ironic that Speiser buttresses his explanation for the negative sense of *nafal* as “making forays” by quoting Judges 7:12, where, he suggests, the same meaning is found. John Skinner uses the same reference in Judges to support his case for the translation “settle”. Perhaps the best commentary is Ju. 7:12. where again the verb *nafal* [spelled in Hebrew letters in Skinner] has the sense of “settle.” Cf. Skinner, p. 354.

Cf. the phrase *al p'ney . . . nafal* in *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, (East Brunswick, N.J. : International Bible Society, 1978) (hereafter NIV): the descendants “lived in hostility toward” their kinfolk, and, *The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1966) (hereafter JB): “He set himself to defy his brothers.” NIV, in a footnote, offers an alternative translation: “lived to the east of.”

11. In *Genesis Rabbah* 53.11. the following are listed:

Immorality (comparing the same verb root in *Genesis* 39:17); it is suggested that Sarah saw Ishmael rape maidens and seduce married women.

New Testament also pictures Ishmael as a negative figure (Galatians 4:21-31, and, especially, v. 29). Though Ishmael is sent away, as seen in Chapter 21, according to another source he is one of the two servants accompanying Abraham and Isaac on their journey to Mt. Moriah in Chapter 22. One reason why the servants are told to stay at the foot of the mountain is Ishmael's baseness, if not his actual wickedness.¹²

In addition to what has been cited above, there are other references to the wickedness or depravity of Ishmael and his ongoing evil reputation.¹³ The anti-Ishmael tradition suggests that his descendants were as evil as he was. Certainly this is reflected in the reference to Ishmaelites in Psalm 83. One of the best known references to Ishmaelite evil is the statement found in various sources regarding the gift of the Torah to Israel at Sinai. Israel was not the first nation to whom it was offered, for God had tried to give it to other nations beforehand, including the descendants of Ishmael. "What is contained there?" they each wished to know. To the Ishmaelites came the reply: "You shall not steal, (i.e., kidnap)." They then explained that they were unable to accept the Torah,

Idolatry (comparing the same verb root in Exodus 32:6): it is suggested that Sarah saw Ishmael build altars and catch small creatures and sacrifice them.

Murder (comparing a similar verb with a similar meaning in II Samuel 2:14,16 — the verb root *sin-het-kuf*); cf. F. Brown, S.R. Driver, C. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 965.

Mockery (noting that in the next verse Sarah speaks of her concern for Isaac's "inheritance"); it is suggested that Ishmael was wont to mock at the rejoicing over Isaac. Ishmael states that he is the first-born and, therefore, will be the chief heir.

Benno Jacob offers the same explanation of "mocking." Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, Ernst I. Jacob and Walter Jacob, eds., trs., abridgers (New York: KTAV), p. 137.

The Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer contains a similar, but more detailed, statement about Ishmael consciously shooting arrows at Isaac, and notes that Sarah saw this and was, understandably, distressed. A Talmudic comment suggests that Ishmael was an idolater. There is also an explanation elsewhere that Ishmael taunted his younger sibling with the fact that he (Ishmael) had consented to the covenant of circumcision as an adult (he was thirteen at the time) while Isaac has been but a baby. Isaac thereupon retorted that he would be willing to give his life if God were to demand it and, immediately thereafter, came the episode of the "Binding" (and near sacrifice) of Isaac.

12. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 31, p. 224 ff.; *Genesis Rabbah* 56.2; *Leviticus Rabbah* 26.7; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 9.7.1 (Introduction).

13. Ishmael hated Isaac: *Exodus Rabbah* 5.1 and *Song of Songs Rabbah* 8.1.1; Abraham had two sons, one righteous and one wicked: *Numbers Rabbah* 11.2; Ishmael was depraved: *Exodus Rabbah* 1:1; Abraham had a wicked child: B. Talmud *Pesahim* 56 a; 119 b; Cf. B. Talmud *Shabbat* 146 a: Esau went to Ishmael to learn about evil: *Exodus Rabbah* 1.1.

Though it is suggested that Ishmael was one of a select group of people whose names were determined by God at a time prior to their birth (the list includes Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Solomon, Josiah, and King Messiah), nonetheless, Ishmael's name still was cast into a negative light, even at this juncture: *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 32 basing itself on Psalm 55:19 (p. 231, cf. n. 8); *Mekhilla de Rabbi Ishmael*, Tractate *Pisha* 16.87 (hereafter *Mekhilla*) Jacob Z. Lauderbach, tr. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961). (The *Mekhilla* passage does not include Moses or King Messiah, and has a different "proof-text"—Psalm 58:4)

for stealing (kidnapping) was part of *their* national heritage.¹⁴ The *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* lists some fifteen future crimes that the descendants of Ishmael would commit in the land of Israel “in the latter days,” and there is even a suggestion that the Ishmaelites would try to prevent the coming of the Messiah.¹⁵

5. *The traditional sources and the redemption of Ishmael's reputation*

An anti-Ishmael stance was not the only position taken by the classical sources. Indeed, a presumption of Ishmael's innocence, certainly in regard to his “playing” (Gen. 21:9), is supported by none other than God! This defense comes at that poignant moment when Hagar and Ishmael have been cast out and are wandering in the desert (Gen. 21:14 ff.).¹⁶ “God . . . heeded the cry of the boy *where he is*,” explains the Bible. In *Midrash Rabbah* the explanation is that the ministering angels hastened to indict Ishmael, suggesting that, in a future time, he would wreak evil against the people of Israel. Yet God demanded of them, “*where is he now?*” to which they answered “righteous.” God then said, “I judge someone only as *he is at the moment*.”¹⁷ If Ishmael had been immoral, an idolater, a murderer or even a mocker, then surely he could not also be righteous, as God recognizes and as the angels must concede.

The anti-Ishmael tradition within classical Jewish sources notwithstanding, through the ages Bible translators have differed on this crucial verb *mezahek* (playing?) in Genesis 21:9. RSV and JB have the word “playing” as does *TANAKH*. The NEB has “laughing” and KJV, NIV and Knox have “mocking” (though Knox seems unsure of the validity of this negative translation.)¹⁸ Clearly, there was Biblical support that Ishmael

14. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 41, p. 319; *Pesikta Rabbati* 21.2-3, William Braude, tr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 417; B. Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 2b; *Mekhilla*, Tractate *Bahodesh* 5.74 ff. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 30.3.

15. Among these outrages are: turning a cemetery into a pasture land and dunghill (desecrating the dead); falsehood that would multiply so that truth would be hidden; the multiplication of sins and the attempt to build their own building in the area of the Temple (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 30, p. 221). The building referred to may be the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

16. Hagar forebears to see the death of her child, and so she places him under some bushes and goes away some distance. Sitting apart, she bursts into tears. It is the boy's cry, however, that God hears. God then sends an angel to Hagar, who explains that “God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is” (Gen. 21:17).

17. *Genesis Rabbah* 53.14; *Exodus Rabbah* 3.2; *Lamentations Rabbah* 2.2.4. The “future sin” of Ishmael is based on a reading of Isaiah 21:13 ff. which is understood to mean an unheeded appeal by Israel to the Arabs for water. The Arabs are understood to be Ishmael's descendants. Cf. *Kur'an Surah* 6.86.

18. Knox has a note which suggests that “the literal sense of the Latin version seems rather to be ‘playing with her own son,’” and then goes on to explain, as does RSV, that “with her own son” is not in the Hebrew text. Speiser suggests that the phrase may have been once present: “To judge, however, from some of the ancient versions,

would have a streak of violence. As noted above, the statement is unambiguous:

He [Ishmael] shall be a wild ass of a man; His hand shall be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him (Gen. 16:12).

There were comments that Ishmael (and his descendants) would fight his (their) kin. Yet it was also suggested, in rabbinic texts, that Ishmael would turn from his evil ways. Abraham is told so on occasion.¹⁹

According to another tradition, Abraham is personally, but indirectly, involved in Ishmael's repentance. He goes to see his (estranged) son and, through the medium of a coded message, which Ishmael clearly understands, the younger man changes his ways. In this charming episode Abraham visits Ishmael's camp but does not dismount from his camel (for the Patriarch had promised Sarah that he would not step foot before Ishmael). He is greeted very curtly and discourteously by Ishmael's wife, who tells him that her husband is not at home. Abraham departs, but first he leaves a message that an old man from Canaan had been by and that the threshold of Ishmael's house was not good for Ishmael. Ishmael understands, and his mother finds him a new wife. Three years later Abraham returns and, again, Ishmael is not at home. The new Mrs. Ishmael, however, offers a warm greeting, and Abraham *offers up a prayer for Ishmael which results in blessings for Ishmael's home.*²⁰

At Abraham's death, both Isaac and Ishmael are present to bury him in the Cave of Makhpelah (Gen. 25:9). The fact that Isaac's name is mentioned first (after all, he is the younger brother) allows the commentators, including Rashi and Ramban, to say something good about Ishmael. Ishmael deferred the central honors of burial to Isaac since he was the chief inheritor. This certainly is in contrast to the opinion of the traditional rabbinic commentators about Esau, for they can barely praise him even when he joins Jacob in burying Isaac.²¹ That Ishmael is not always cast in an

the original text appears to have included 'with her son Isaac,' which is lacking in the MT, perhaps through haplography" (Speiser, p. 155).

Bruce Vawter notes that the words playing "*with her son Isaac*" found in the Septuagint [and Vulgate] were "deliberately omitted" by a scribe "in order to obscure the picture ... of the two boys of roughly the same age romping together" (italics added). Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1977), pp. 248-249.

19. *Genesis Rabbah* 30.4; 38.12; B. Talmud *Berakhot* 16b.

20. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 30, p. 218 ff.

21. *Genesis Rabbah* 62.3; 62.5. "Peacefully Isaac and Ishmael bury the old man," so Von Rad, p. 257. Yet, Von Rad wonders if P might not have known about the rejection of Ishmael in Genesis 21.

On Esau: cf. B. Talmud *Baba Batra* 16b. Yet, in contrast, see *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 38, p. 289. The negative rabbinic view of Esau at this point is in contrast to that of more modern commentators and scholars who see a reconciliation between Esau and Jacob at Isaac's burial: "Esau and Jacob, now peacefully united, bury Isaac." (Westermann, p. 557); "complete reconciliation" (Benno Jacob, p. 240; cf. Vawter, p. 366).

evil mode is further suggested by the tradition in the Talmud that, if Ishmael appears to one in a dream, he will bring an answer to the dreamer.²²

6. *Sarah and Hagar*

The enmity, such as it was, between the children of Abraham really reflects a tension that was largely generated in that unique relationship between Sarah and Hagar, and each woman contributed to it in her own way. Sarah is lowered in the esteem of Hagar for the former could not become pregnant. Sarah retaliates by treating Hagar harshly and then, following Isaac's weaning, demanding Hagar's expulsion (Gen. 16:4 ff.; 21:10). *Though it is not Isaac who instigates the expulsion of Ishmael, his presence is the central cause for the rupture in family life.* Sarah is jealous and zealous for her offspring, and determines, in her mind, that the two families cannot live peaceably together. While Abraham would have counselled compromise and a wait-and-see attitude, she remains adamant and, so, Hagar and Ishmael are pitilessly cast out.

That the mothers are a root-cause of the tension is highlighted by the fact that the brothers appear together only after the death of Sarah. Indeed, the reconciliation — *if* that is what was necessary — takes place after the death of Abraham. Though the divisions into *parshiyot* (weekly readings from the Torah) were made much after the Biblical period, it is instructive that the place where the brothers are pictured together (reconciled?) is found at the end of that section known as *Hayyei Sarah*, which begins with the *death* of Sarah and ends with the *death* of Abraham. The old era had ended, and the old tensions can now be put away.

The classical sources generally have little good to say about Hagar as Ishmael's mother. That it is she, and not Abraham, who is to blame is explained by a midrash which says that "Abraham's face would blanch" when he heard about Ishmael's evil ways. (Note that Abraham is not beyond criticism. He is reprimanded for ignoring Ishmael's actions.) Yet, it is Hagar who is labeled as an idolater. Indeed, as soon as she left Abraham's encampment — the text says "she wandered about" — she sought out idols. This is not surprising, for, in *Genesis Rabbah*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai explains that Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter.²³ Still, some traditional commentators indicate a sympathy for Hagar that is brought out in several ways. In the story (mentioned above n.20) where Abraham visits Ishmael, it is Hagar who finds a "respectable" wife for her son. This action would seem to be somewhat curious if Hagar had been so clearly associated with idolatry and it is certainly a different perception of her. Indeed,

22. *B. Talmud Berakhot* 56b. I am indebted to Dr. Robert Gordis for noting that the interpretation of seeing Ishmael in a dream being regarded as a good omen is clearly related to the translation for Ishmael, "God hears."

23. Abraham's face would blanch: *Numbers Rabbah* 2.13; Abraham ineffective with Ishmael: *Genesis Rabbah* 53.12, cf. note 1; *Exodus Rabbah* 1.1; Hagar as idolater: *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 30 (p. 217); Hagar as Pharaoh's daughter: *Genesis Rabbah* 45.1.

there is a tradition, though it is not always stated *directly* in the classical texts, that *when Abraham remarried, he married Hagar*.²⁴

7. Conclusion

Was there conflict between the sons of Abraham? If so, was it a continuing confrontation or were they able to work out a reconciliation? The Bible appears to take a neutral stand on this issue. The later traditional sources generally, but not exclusively, understand their association to be one of tension. Modern Biblical commentaries differ on this matter: some see ongoing tensions, while others speak of reconciliation.

Epilogue

As noted at the beginning of this article, the Biblical text itself does not seem to support the notion of a necessary, ongoing enmity between Isaac and Ishmael. It is later interpreters, in the Talmudic literature and in the medieval world, who chose to cast Ishmael and his descendants in a negative stance. The Biblical *realpolitik* dictated that Israel (to use Lord Palmerston's phrase) "have no external allies and . . . no perpetual enemies."²⁵ This meant, for example, that, in time of need, David could prevail upon a relationship with Moab (I Samuel 22:3 ff.) and Solomon would form an alliance with Tyre and other countries as well; former enemies could become allies when need dictated: the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance in the mid-eighth century B.C.E. and, even earlier, Ahab's alliance with Damascus, come to mind.

As has been pointed out:

In the Bible, Jews are a normal people with normal enemies. They have their own turf and they fight to defend it and expand it. They have allies and they have enemies. They have friends and they have foes. And friends and foes are shifting all the time. Yesterday's enemy is today's ally.²⁶

Though history does not repeat itself, perhaps there are lessons to be learned. Ishmael is traditionally understood to be the progenitor of the Arabs. The tensions between Ishmael and Isaac, therefore, become the paradigm for the tensions between Jews and Arabs and, then, latterly, between Israelis and Palestinians.

Among the Arabs in general, and the Palestinians in particular, there are those who call for an expulsion of all or most Jews from Israel.²⁷ Like-

24. Direct statements that Abraham remarried Hagar: *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chap. 30 (p.219 ff.); cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 47.2 and Rashi on Gen. 25:1. Ibn Ezra and Ramban, however, are of the opinion that Keturah is not the same person as Hagar. Hagar's modesty is attested to in *Genesis Rabbah* 45.10.

25. The full quotation is: "We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and these interests it is our duty to follow" (Speech in the House of Commons on The Polish Question, 1848).

26. Schaffer, p. 354.

27. "The Palestinian National Charter" [also known as the Palestine Liberation Orga-

wise, among some Israelis and others, there are those who would call for the expulsion of all or most of Israel's Arab population.²⁸ These radical voices would "resolve" the Palestinian problem in a way that is reminiscent of the die-hard approach of Sarah. Send them away; then they will no longer be our problem. As the Biblical text shows, however, the matter is not so clear cut. Ishmael may not live in Abraham's household, but positive long term relationships are possible. As the text of Genesis explains, God yet continues to care and provide for Hagar and Ishmael. This is in response to Abraham's earlier plea: "Oh that Ishmael would live by Your favor!" and God's promise that Ishmael would, indeed, be blessed (Gen. 17:18-20). Consequently, the text: "God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness" (Gen. 21:20).

Somehow, the two men, Isaac and Ishmael, in their own time, are able to work out a solution that is acceptable to both. It may have taken, however, the passing of the old generation to accomplish it. The two men, now mature in years, are able to come together for a filial act of piety.²⁹

Just as there are groups that are more "hawkish" and more "dovish" on the issue of "territory for peace," so we find, in the rabbinic and scholarly statements about Ishmael and Isaac, that there are "hawks" and "doves." Some feel that the sense of the Torah text is that Ishmael was, and remained, wicked and a scourge to his kin. Others take the opposite view and suggest that, in time, he changed his ways.

While the weight of material — certainly within the traditional commentaries — would seem to take a harder line against Ishmael and his descendants, it is in no way the only viewpoint. The doves have plenty of material to support their view of the possibilities of compromise and of eventual peace. Families cannot always live together under one roof but, with time and effort, with compromise and good will, they can live "alongside their kin."

nization Charter] specifically paragraphs 5 and 26 in Richard F. Nyrop, *Israel: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1978), Appendix III, p. 417 ff.

28. "THE ARABS LIVING IN ERETZ-YISRAEL MUST BE REPATRIATED." This statement appears in capitals in the article, "POLICIES AND PROGRAMS OF THE AUTHENTIC JEWISH IDEA" in *Kahane* (Sept.-Oct., 1987):19.

29. "[When] Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age . . . His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Makhpelah" (Gen.25:8-9). Indeed, Westermann (p.397) takes note that the "two brothers bury him in harmony and peace." That this act was not an isolated incident is stressed, for the Ishmael narrative continues to speak about his descendants and points out — at least according to some translations — that they "camped alongside all their kinsmen" (Gen. 25:18).

Politics and the Ethics of Judaism

ROBERT GORDIS

Jews the world over, in Israel and in the Diaspora, are deeply disturbed not only by the ongoing bloodshed caused by the Arab resistance, but even more by the violence that the State has felt compelled to use against the *Intifada*. As men and women of moral sensitivity, they are conscious of the discrepancy between the ethical ideals which they regard as binding in their personal lives, and the "less than perfect" measures that have been employed by the Israeli government to suppress the Arab uprising.

Our present concern is not to argue the merits or defects of various approaches to this difficult problem, but, rather, to discuss a perennial issue of which the present situation in Israel has made us painfully aware: the old question debated by moral philosophers, statesmen and people of good will — the relationship of morality to public policy, in general, and to international affairs, in particular.

Historically, there have been three major approaches to the problem of the relevance of ethical standards to the foreign policy of nations. The oldest and most widely practiced view is the one least often articulated. It maintains that there is no connection between ethical standards and international affairs. For this school of thought, foreign policy is exclusively an instrument for advancing the interests of the state, whose leaders are obligated to use all of the means at their disposal, with no concern for moral considerations. The classic expression of this viewpoint is to be found in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which seeks to train the ruler to manipulate public affairs in accordance with the practical needs of the hour. Centuries later, Karl Marx, who defined religion as the opiate of the people, and his associate, Friedrich Engels, sought to buttress the view that ethical standards are the instrument by which religion attempts to enforce obedience to the status quo upon the oppressed groups in society. It follows, therefore, that ethical considerations are merely a facade or a tool, possessing no genuine validity of their own. In our century, totalitarian dictatorships — fascist, Nazi and communist — have not hesitated to employ such terms as "democracy," "freedom," and "peace" in their vocabulary as conscious disguises for achieving non-moral ends. And if a philosophy of ethics is desiderated, "the good" is defined in a dictatorship, whatever its hue — black, brown or red — as whatever advances the interest of the state, the race, or the party. In democratic lands, those who adopt this view of our problem remind us, first, that politics is the art of the possible,

and second, that in our grossly imperfect world, the possible is always less than good.

At the opposite pole from this cynical approach is an attitude which has relatively few advocates today — the position of the idealist. There is a current tendency, which must be guarded against, to over-simplify the position and exaggerate its naivete. Yet it remains true that, fundamentally, this attitude derives from a strong optimism with regard to human nature and its capacities and, as a corollary, from the belief in virtually automatic progress in history that moves inevitably toward greater justice and peace in international affairs.

The ideological sources of this liberal faith are to be found in eighteenth century secular humanism, expressed, for example, in Rousseau's belief in the fundamental goodness of man, which has been corrupted by the artificialities of civilization, and in Condorcet's doctrine of the perfectibility of human nature. A figure as distant from the philosophers of the Age of Reason as Hegel declared that *Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht*. When the Kingdom of God was interpreted in purely secular terms, the congruence of the rational humanism of the eighteenth century and the religious idealism of the Scriptures seemed complete.

The idealism of the political liberal, whether derived from secular or religious sources, suffered major setbacks in the mid-twentieth century. The "war to end war" and to "make the world safe for democracy" failed in both objectives. The Second World War marked a desperate attempt by the free nations to destroy the manifestations of bestiality deeply rooted in human nature, but though the Fascist and Nazi varieties of totalitarianism were overthrown, their features were absorbed into the various dictatorships and military regimes in Africa, Asia and Latin America. As a result, many former idealists have relapsed into cynical disillusion.

Another alternative, and the one that is, by all odds, the most popular, has found a wide response. It is that of the "realists" in politics. Many of them are religious believers who find in the Bible the source of their conception of human nature. They declare that man's weaknesses are the basic constituents of his nature, so that all his activities are, at worst, evil, and, at best, morally ambiguous. Since the vices of pride, self-assertion, and the will to power inevitably find expression in the area of political activity, politics cannot be reasonably expected to obey the dictates of ethics. The best that can be hoped for is the choice of the least evil of alternatives. Any effort to invoke moral principles in politics must lead to defeat, if not to disaster, because the nature of reality does not conform to the demands of the ethical conscience. This widespread school of thought would answer in the affirmative to the question: is there a basic difference between individual morality and the morality of public policy choices for a political community?

I would suggest that all three answers rest upon several prior assumptions that are by no means self-evident or true.

Conceivably, moral philosophers in an ivory tower, and religious leaders communing with their God, could arrive at a set of universal principles that would be acceptable to all human beings. This has, indeed, been the case with Hillel's Golden Rule and Kant's Categorical Imperative, but, in the work-a-day in which men and nations live and struggle, when they are confronted by concrete situations, they are motivated and guided not by a single, universal doctrine, but by particular — and particularistic — systems of ethics, which derive from their own personal background and group experience.

The two great religious traditions in the West, Judaism and Christianity, have much in common. They both revere the same Scripture and sacred history. Since Christianity arose within the Jewish community, and its earliest and most influential figures were Jews, there has been an association, though not always a happy one, for twenty centuries. Hence, there is an element of validity in the term, "The Judeo-Christian tradition," which has won wide acceptance in the West, particularly in the United States. But it has had the unfortunate effect of obscuring some fundamental differences between the two "partners" which are scarcely less significant than are the similarities. One of the most important divergences is the profound contrast in their respective conceptions of human nature and, consequently, in the system of morality that each tradition has fashioned.

I submit that, *only if the Christian view of human nature and its ethical code is accepted, are we confronted by the difference "between individual morality and public policy."*

For its view of human nature, classical Christianity takes as its point of departure the doctrine of "original sin," the belief that the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden placed an ineradicable taint upon the human race, and stamped human nature as essentially evil, redeemable only by faith in the "righteous Teacher" of the Qumran scrolls or Jesus, or another savior.

This essentially negative view of human nature is a reflex of the pessimism that gripped wide sections of Greco-Roman society as classical paganism disintegrated during the first centuries of the Common Era. Among the Jews in Palestine, where the faith in a just God beat powerfully, the Roman oppression bred a passioante belief that a cataclysm which would usher in the kingdom of God was imminent, since the structures of society were on the threshold of annihilation. Only the individual mattered.

The interim ethic of self-abnegation expresses itself in terms of emotional attitudes, extolling virtues like love and charity, rather than in the promulgation of specific norms of conduct through a system of law. In fact, the New Testament tends to decry such efforts as le-

galism, as an impersonal and heartless approach to the problems of human relationships. Its antinomian bias, as Paul indicates, is directed not merely against the ritual elements of the law, but against ethical enactments as well: "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (Corinthians 3:6).

The ethics of self-abnegation has also been the source of the doctrine of non-resistance to evil. It may, incidentally, be pointed out — a fact little known — that the New Testament teaching of "turning the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39) is derived from the Hebrew Bible. "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth, . . . (to) put his mouth in the dust; there may yet be hope that in giving his cheek to smiters, let him be surfeited with insults" (Lamentations 3:27-30). In the Hebrew Bible, however, this behavior is described as a tragic fact in human experience, not as an intrinsic ideal.

To be sure, nonresistance to evil has never been widely practiced, except in the life of small, homogeneous groups. Yet, it has been regarded in Christian teachings as representing the highest ethical good. The ethics of self-abnegation counsels submission to tyranny:

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers.
For there is no power but of God,
The powers that be are ordained of God,
Whosoever therefore resists the power,
Resists the ordinance of God;
And they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (Romans 13:1-2).

The classic utterance of Jesus, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25) has been subjected to a vast amount of interpretation. It is generally taken by Christian thinkers to be normative for the relationship of church and state or, alternatively, of religion and society. Whatever other levels of meaning may be found in it, this utterance seems to be in conformity with Paul's elaboration in Romans, cited above, and would seem to express a willingness to accept political tyranny.

The ethics of self-abnegation also urges submission to social inequality, including slavery:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well (I Peter 2:13-14).

That these injunctions were not treated as dead-letters is clear from the entire history of the Western world, where the Church was overwhelmingly allied with the secular power in nearly every struggle against tyranny.

Nevertheless, the doctrine of "original sin," eloquently preached

in the Epistles of Paul, is by no means identical with the view of man that is expounded in the Hebrew Bible, or even in the Gospels. Nor is it the "plain sense" of the Paradise narrative in Genesis. In later centuries, the Christian church recognized this truth. Not only in Pelagianism, which the Christian church officially rejected, but in the systems of theology which it sanctioned, the doctrine of "original sin" was substantially modified and attenuated. Today, the doctrine of "original sin" has been surrendered by many, if not by most, Christians on the conscious level. However, the pattern of human behavior, perhaps most noticeably in the area of sexual mores, demonstrates how powerful is the hold of this doctrine on the human subconscious.

Neither "original sin" nor the ethics of self-abnegation became normative in traditional Judaism. Rabbinic thought, which yielded to no one in its recognition of the elements of imperfection in man, had conceived of man's native endowment as neutral and saw his instinctual equipment as neither good nor evil *per se*, the ultimate judgment upon them depending upon the uses to which they were put. In this worldview, man is a battle-ground as long as he lives between two impulses, the good (*yezer hatov*) and the evil (*yezer hara*). There is no disposition to underestimate the power of the evil impulse in its manifold forms, but, concomitant with it, is the recognition that even this impulse can be an instrument for the service of God.

Thus, the great Biblical injunction: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" bears the Rabbinic comment, "with both your impulses, the good and the evil" (*Berakhot* 54a). Anticipating Freud on several counts, the Rabbis are fully aware of the power of sexual desire in human life and of its capacity for working havoc with people's lives. They also express their insight that without this "evil impulse" most human functions, such as creative activity, family life and economic pursuits, would cease. According to this approach, human nature is plastic, and any ethical judgment upon its character must follow, not precede, its manifestations in human life.

In sum, for classical New Testament Christianity, people sin *because* they are sinners; for traditional Judaism, people are sinners when they sin.

Rooted in these differing conceptions of human nature are two systems of ethics. While each approach finds expression in both traditions, it is fair to say that one, the ethics of self-abnegation, is central in classical Christianity, while the other, the ethics of self-fulfillment, is basic to normative Judaism. The ethics of self-abnegation finds its clearest expression in the Sermon on the Mount, which presents it as the highest ideal of human conduct. The ethics of self-fulfillment reaches its apogee in the Ten Commandments and in the Golden Rule (Lev. 19:18), reaffirmed by Hillel and Rabbi Akiba as "the great principle of the Torah," while ben Azzai found it in the text of Gen. 5:1: "This

is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created Adam, He fashioned him in the divine image," underscoring both the unity and the dignity of humankind.

A distinguished Christian theologian was asked, "What has contemporary politics to do with the Sermon on the Mount?" and he replied, with perfect justice, "Nothing, and it shouldn't." The same categorical negative could not, I believe, have been given to the question, "What has practical politics to do with the Ten Commandments?" For the Decalogue was proclaimed at the beginning of a nation's history; the Sermon on the Mount was believed to usher in the end of history. The former inaugurated the commencement of the significant moral activity of the people of God; the latter announced the conclusion of its group experience in the context of the natural order.

The ethics of self-fulfillment which finds expression in many concrete provisions in the Torah is elaborated upon in the halakhah of the Talmud and the Codes. Being intended for a perdurable society that was not likely to disappear overnight, Jewish law, both Biblical and Rabbinic, is concerned with all of the nitty-gritty details of group relations that constitute the framework of human existence. The conduct of husband and wife, parents and children, their mutual duties, all receive considerable attention in the sources. The relations of the individual and the community and their responsibilities to one another are addressed in detail. The conduct of the nation in the world, including the waging of war and the pursuit of peace, occupy an important place in the Torah and the Prophets. The Rabbis are aware that, in the Biblical injunction, "Your brother shall live with you" (Lev. 25:35), another injunction is also implied: "With you; this means that your life comes before that of your fellow" (*Baba Mezia* 62a). Jewish law is realistic in its concept of human nature, recognizing human limitations and potentialities alike. It teaches idealism as its goal, but it demands decency as its minimum. The endless scroll of Jewish heroism and martyrdom through the ages testifies to the capacity of the ethics of self-fulfillment to evoke the noblest acts of self-sacrifice for a cause.

Since life is the supreme good, the ethics of self-fulfillment, including its highest manifestation, the act of martyrdom for an ideal goal, finds its justification in the fact that the individual's self-sacrifice ultimately redounds to the enhancement of life for the community. On the other hand, the immolation of a nation or the liquidation of an entire society would have no such beneficial result upon the remainder of humanity. It follows that the only ethic which may legitimately be applied to the group, its aspirations and activities, is the ethics of self-fulfillment, which presupposes self-preservation.

Realistic in its understanding of human nature, the ethics of self-fulfillment stresses concrete deeds rather than abstract emotions, and trusts to right actions to lead to proper feelings rather than the reverse.

The Sermon on the Mount makes an extreme demand on human nature — comprehensible as an interim ethic — when it proclaims the famous injunction “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:4). On the other hand, the Book of the Covenant in Exodus (23:4, 5) ordains: “If you meet your enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the ass of your foe lying under its burden, you shall not pass by him, but must release it with him.” Rabbinic teaching carries this approach to one’s enemies to its conclusion. “Who is a hero, he who makes his foe his friend” (*Abot de Rabbi Nathan*, ch. 23).

It has not been adequately noted that this strong infusion of realism in the Jewish ethic of self-fulfillment has its source not only in the Torah and the Prophets, but primarily in Wisdom, the third spiritual current in ancient Israel. All too often the ethical contribution of “practical Wisdom” that is expounded in the Book of Proverbs, *Kohleth*, and Ben Sira, has been overlooked. An indispensable dimension in Biblical ethics is added by the emphasis which the Wisdom writers placed on realism as a virtue, and on intelligence as obedience to the will of God. While traditional religious teachers taught that the sinner is a fool, Wisdom declared that the fool is a sinner.

From this conviction two corollaries follow: a course of action, however practical it may seem at the outset, is doomed to failure if it violates the canons of morality; and, conversely, a course of action, however high-minded its aims, is likewise unacceptable if it be unrealistic, because it, too, cannot genuinely advance human well-being.

At last, we are able to respond to the question: Is there a difference between the dictates of individual morality and the imperatives that governments and nations must follow? If morality is identified with the ethics of self-abnegation, the answer is clearly in the affirmative — the two patterns of behavior are not compatible. However, if we conceive of morality as an ethic of self-fulfillment, there is no fundamental difference between the demands made on the individual and the standards to which governments should be held.

This theoretical conclusion is borne out both by Jewish tradition and by Jewish history. Never in the Biblical period, when Jews were masters of their own destiny, living under a government of their choice, did any Biblical teacher recognize a dichotomy between the morality applicable to the individual and that practiced by governments. Nor does the record disclose any evidence that such an argument was made by the practitioners of *Realpolitik* in those days.

Neither Abraham nor Job, neither Moses nor the Prophets, operated with two distinct systems of right and wrong. Similarly, Amos castigated Syria, Moab and Ammon for the physical cruelty which they visited upon their conquered enemies, and condemned the Phillistines and the Phoenicians for driving their foes into exile. In the “Great Arraignment,” Amos applied the same standard to the social sins, the

economic inequities and the sexual immorality rampant within Israel (Amos, chs. 1-2).

With the benefit of historical hindsight 2500 years later, we know that it was the visionary Prophets and not the practical politicians of the day, the kings and the aristocrats, who were the true realists in the international arena. It was Isaiah, and not Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah, who urged neutrality in the face of the Assyrian crisis and was vindicated by the course of events. A century later, it was the passion of the “patriotic” party at court, and not Jeremiah’s counsel opposing rebellion against Babylonia, that led to the destruction of the monarchy, the burning of the Temple, and the all-but-complete annihilation of the Jewish people.

For the Prophets and the Bible as a whole, the same standard of good and evil, right and wrong, applied to the behavior of God and man, the individual and the nation. Cruelty and injustice, violence and oppression, were violations of the principle which, for them, was built into the structure of the universe.* This principle, which I have called “the law of consequence,” can no more be violated with impunity than can any fundamental law in the physical universe.

The Rabbis of the Talmudic era had little occasion to meditate on state-craft and to apply the principles that should underlie it, but their judgment on the fate of the Roman Empire was entirely of a piece with the prophetic judgment upon the inhumanity and arrogance of Babylonia and Assyria. The medieval commentator who saw in the Pesah song, *Had Gadya*, a parable of the sin and punishment of the successive empires arising in history, shared the prophetic world-view with his predecessors. He who would argue for dichotomy between the ethics of the individual and the morality of government flies in the face of Jewish tradition; indeed, the tradition would insist that it runs counter to the testimony of human experience and is doomed to failure.

The problems confronting Israel today are tragically complex. The countless solutions that have been proposed must be weighed by the standards of Jewish ethics, resting upon the twin pillars of *zedek* and *sekhel*, righteousness and wisdom, sympathy and intelligence. What is decisively ruled out is any approach — whether to the Arab-Israel problem or any other — that establishes a dichotomy between politics and morality.

* Right doing leads to well-being and wrong doing to disaster — both in the life of the individual and in affairs of state.

Omnipotence, Omniscience and a Finite God

GILBERT S. ROSENTHAL

I

IN JUDAISM, THE TRADITIONALLY HELD view of God is that He is omnipotent or all-powerful and that he can do all, for nothing is beyond His power. Similarly, God is omniscient or all-wise; He knows all, He is aware of the outcome of events before they even happen; He is cognizant of a human being's inner thoughts and motives; He knows which choice we will make even before we make it.

There are numerous examples of these ideas in the Bible, in our prayers, in Rabbinic thought, and in the philosophical and theological writings of the medieval sages and scholars. Indeed, both notions have been raised almost to the level of dogmas of Jewish theology. Yehezkel Kaufmann argued that the Biblical authors stressed both ideas about God in order to break irrevocably with paganism and to emphasize unequivocally that the Jewish deity is not limited in power or geographical scope, nor curtailed by magical forces or fate.¹ Kaufmann Kohler, Abraham Marmorstein and Ephraim E. Urbach have suggested that the sages deliberately emphasized the notion of an infinite, omnipotent and omniscient deity in Graeco-Roman times because pagans worshipped idols or deified their kings. Moreover, pagans limited the scope or power of their various deities to special realms or specific territories or geographic areas.² In short, Judaism made a clear and unequivocal split with paganism on this core issue. For the Jew, God is infinite; He is all-powerful and all-knowing. Indeed, no human can approach His knowledge or power.

II

Certainly there is abundant evidence in the Bible for the teachings of divine power and wisdom. For example, the Torah states right at the

1. Cf. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Toledot Ha-Emunah Ha-Yisraelit* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1953), Vol. I, Book 2, p. 417 ff.

2. See Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (Cincinnati: The Riverdale Press, 1943), pp. 91-95; A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* (New York: KTAV, 1968), pp. 153-176; Ephraim E. Urbach, *Hazal* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1969), pp. 69-81. Cf. Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (New York: Behrman House, 1973), pp. 72-80 and 125-185; Louis Jacobs, *Principles of the Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 90 ff., 141-148, 320-349.

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outset that God is the creator of the heavens and earth and can do all that He wills, and the theme is reiterated time and again:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

"Is anything too wondrous for the Lord?"

"Is there a limit to the Lord's power?"

"He made the earth by His might, established the world by His wisdom, and, through His understanding, stretched out the heavens."

"The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, observing the bad and the good."

"He searches out our innermost thoughts and mind."³

The book of Job stresses the awesome power of God vis-à-vis men. "You know that You can do everything and that no purpose can be withheld from You." The God-speeches make the point even more emphatic. Man, puny man, cannot even fathom the mystery of the natural world, whose purpose is known to God alone. How, then, can he hope to fathom the mystery of the moral world whose scheme is likewise part of a Grand Design?⁴

The Psalms express the notion of God's infinite power and knowledge on virtually every page. His strength and glory fill the earth, His power knows no limit, He knows all there is to know, even the secrets of the human heart. "Great is the Lord and much acclaimed; His greatness cannot be fathomed. "God knows the innermost thoughts of every human being."⁵ Clearly, the Biblical God is all-powerful and all-wise.

The rabbinic conception of God develops and builds on the Biblical themes. The bulk of aggadic and even halakhic statements support the notion of an infinitely powerful and wise deity. Aggadic literature abounds with tales or homilies extolling God's power. One of the common terms for God in the Talmud and Midrash is *Ha-Gevurah*, "the Power," and a popular description of Him is *Ha-Gibbor*, "the Powerful One."⁶ God is described as a "seeing eye and a listening ear." His power is seen in the two greatest of miracles: making the rain fall and resurrecting the dead.⁷ God has the power of the greatest of warriors; His strength knows no equal. We human beings cannot grasp His might, and no creature can possibly fathom His deeds. The following parable from the Mekhilta underscores the point:

3. Genesis 1:1; 14:9 and 22; 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17 and 27; Numbers 11:23; Isaiah 50:2; Jeremiah 10:12 and 27:5; Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 11:20 and 17:10; Isaiah 29:15.

4. Job 30-42. Cf. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), *passim*.

5. Cf. Psalms 7:10; 33:13-15; 94:9-11; 104:9; 106:2; 145:3 and *passim*.

6. The term, *mi-pi Ha-Gevurah*, "from the mouth of the Powerful One," appears innumerable times. The noun, *Ha-Gibbor*, "the Powerful One," is found in the first blessing of the daily *Amidah*. Cf. Marmorstein, *Op. cit.*, p. 82ff.

7. *Avot* II, 1. Cf. the second blessing of the daily *Amidah* which is referred to as *gevurot*, "powers;" Mishnah *Berakhot* V, 2 and IX, 2; *Rosh Hashanah* IV, 5; *Taanit* 7a and b and 9b.

"I will sing unto the Lord for He is really exalted" (Exodus 15:2). When a king of flesh and blood enters a province, all praise him to his face, saying that he is mighty when he is really weak; that he is rich when he really is poor; that he is wise when he really is foolish; that he is just and faithful when he really has none of these qualities. They all merely flatter him. It is not so, however, with Him, by whose word the world came into being. But, "I will sing unto the Lord who is mighty," as it is said: "The great God, the mighty and awesome," etc. (Deuteronomy 10:17). "The Long strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle" (Psalms 24:8). "The Lord will go forth as a mighty man" (Isaiah 42:13). "There is none like unto You, O Lord; You are great and Your name is great in might."⁸

A charmingly naive little story from the Palestinian Talmud, which is reminiscent of the storm scene in the Book of Jonah, develops the notion of God's might in all the realms of nature, in heaven and on earth, on land and on sea, in every country and nation:

Rabbi Tanhuma told the tale of a shipload of gentiles that set out to sea. Among the passengers was a Jewish lad. A terrible storm came up, and each passenger began to pray to his god and his idol, but in vain as the storm continued to rage. Since they saw that their prayers had failed, they turned to the Jewish lad and said, "Come now, pray to your god, for we have heard that He answers your prayers when you cry out to Him and that He is truly powerful." At once, the lad cried out with all his heart and prayed to God, who answered his prayer and caused the storm to abate. The ship came to dry land safely, and the passengers disembarked to buy provisions. They asked the Jewish lad, "Aren't you buying any provisions?" He replied, "What do you expect of me, since I'm only a poor guest?" They responded, "You are no poor guest! We are the poor guests! For we are here while our gods are in Babylon or in Rome, and our gods are powerless here even if we've brought our idols with us. But, as for you, wherever you go, your God is with you."⁹

Rabbi Abbahu makes the same point, quoting a homily of Rabbi Eleazar:

"Happy is the person whose help is the God of Jacob" (Psalms 146:5). What is written afterwards? "He makes heaven and earth." Now, what connection is there between this and that? A king of flesh and blood has a proconsul, who rules over one province but not over another. And, even if you find a caesar who rules over the dry land, does he rule over the sea? But, the Holy One, blessed be He, rules over the sea and land. He rescues people from the waters of the sea and from fire on the dry land; He saved Moses from Pharaoh's sword, Jonah from the whale's belly, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah from the fiery furnace, and Daniel from the lion's den."¹⁰

God's omnipotence is stressed in the liturgy which represents the crystallization of rabbinic lore and theology. A special blessing, recited when we hear thunder or see a storm, reads: "Blessed are You, Whose power and might fill the whole world."¹¹ One of the frequently used ad-

8. *Mekhilta Shirata* II, p. 8 ff. (ed. Lauterbach).

9. *Yerushalmi Berakhot* IX, 1; 13b.

10. *Ibid.*

11. The *berakhah* is found in the Mishnah *Berakhot* IX, 2.

jectives to describe God is “the mighty One.” And the medieval *paytanim* often refer to God (borrowing the phrase from Job 42:1) as *hakol yakhol* or *ha-kol yu-khal*, “He Who can do all” or “He Who will do all.”¹²

God’s omniscience or absolute knowledge and even foreknowledge of human actions follows logically from the idea of omnipotence, and is already adumbrated in the Bible. Isaiah berates the sinners who sin secretly, believing perversely, “Who sees us and who will know our deeds?”¹³ And Jeremiah speaks of God “Who searches out the heart and the inner thoughts of man and will punish sinners accordingly.”¹⁴ The Psalmist describes God in this manner:

From heaven God looks down seeing all human beings. From His throne He surveys all the inhabitants of the earth.¹⁵

Rabbinic lore and law make the point even more emphatic. Rabbi Akiba’s paradox is well known and eternally perplexing: “All is seen by God, yet free will is given to humans.”¹⁶ God knows the future; he has pre-knowledge whether a saint or a sinner is to be born; He knows before conception which path in life an embryo will choose.¹⁷ A popular rabbinic phrase about God is: “It is revealed and known unto You, God,” etc. The liturgy abounds in such phrases as: “You know the secrets of the world” or “You search out our hearts and deepest thoughts” or “You, Who know all thoughts, save us!” or “Nothing is forgotten or concealed from You.”¹⁸

The Halakhah also seeks to underscore the idea of an all-knowing Deity. “Why does the Torah punish a thief who steals secretly more severely, and requires of him five-fold compensation, than a robber who steals openly who must pay but four-fold compensation?” Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai replies:

The thief believes that God does not know his crime because he commits it secretly. He thus denies God’s supreme wisdom and is punished with five-fold compensation. But the robber who steals openly and in broad daylight acknowledges that God knows everything, so his punishment is lighter and he pays four-fold compensation.¹⁹

In Graeco-Roman times, the ideas of God’s omnipotence and omniscience came under attack from pagan philosophers and military leaders. We find a goodly number of “debates” between pagan monarchs or phi-

12. See, e.g., the *piyyut*, *Melekh Elyon* by Simeon Isaac of Mainz, that is recited on Rosh Hashanah.

13. Isaiah 29:15.

14. Jeremiah 17:10 and 32:19. Cf. Proverbs 5:21; Job 31:4 and 34:21.

15. Psalm 33:14-15.

16. *Avot* III, 15. It is moot whether the phrase means “all is seen by God” or “all is foreseen by God.” *Zafuy* can have both meanings, although passages using the passive form of the verb *zofeh* seem to allude to foreknowledge by God of future events.

17. Cf. Genesis *Rabbah* 8:4; 9:6; 14:3; 27:7; Exodus *Rabbah* 21:3; Midrash Psalms 45:4, ed. Buber, p. 270; *Seder Eliahu Rabbah* I, ed. Ish Shalom, p. 3, and *passim*.

18. These passages are from the High Holiday and Sukkot services.

19. *Baba Kama* 79b.

losophers and the sages over these issues. Whether such debates actually took place or not is moot but it is certain that, with the Roman Wars and the fall of Jerusalem, there were pagan taunts against the Jewish belief in the omnipotence and omniscience of the God of Israel. After all, how could YHWH permit the destruction of His holy temple and the bloody conquest and exile of His chosen people? Didn't that prove that Zeus or Jupiter was more powerful than the unseen, silent and seemingly impotent YHWH?²⁰

The colloquy between Rabbi Joshua ben Korḥa and a pagan philosopher about sin, repentance and divine foreknowledge is noteworthy: "If your God knew in advance that humans will sin and are mortal, why did He create them? Surely this proves your God has no foreknowledge of human affairs." Rabbi Joshua replied, "Do you have children? Do you not anticipate that they may sin? By your logic, then, you should not have had children!"²¹

Similar dialogues and debates took place during the Roman Wars as the Romans sought to prove the power of their deities over the vanquished God of the Judeans. We have a number of such alleged debates involving Vespasian and Titus, who taunted the leading sages of their day.²² Likewise, we are told of such disputations in the time of the Bar Kokhba rebellion. One famous exchange pits the Roman Governor, Tineius Rufus, against Rabbi Akiba.

"If your God loves the poor people, why does He not support them?" Replied Rabbi Akiba: "He does not intervene in order to save us from judgment in Gehenna by having us do acts of charity."²³

To counter such pagan arguments, the sages stressed God's omnipotence and omniscience whenever possible, using the terms *Ha-Gibbor* or *Ha-Gevurah*, even to the point of viewing the gift of Torah as a sign of God's power.²⁴

The medieval Jewish philosophers adopted the rabbinic position as the correct one. Saadia declared that God is both omnipotent and omniscient, and his views are endorsed by Yehudah Halevi, Abraham ibn Daud, Maimonides, Crescas, Albo, and virtually all of the leading Jewish philosophers.²⁵ Maimonides, to be sure, equivocates somewhat because

20. Cf. Marmorstein, *Op. cit.*, p. 155 ff.; Urbach, *Op. cit.*, pp. 69 and 76.

21. *Genesis Rabbah* 27:7.

22. See *Gittin* 56b and parallels and *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, ed. Schechter, A, VI, p. 32 and B, VII, p. 20.

23. *Baba Batra* 10a.

24. Cf. Urbach, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

25. Saadia Gaon, *Emunot Ve-Deot* IV, 4, tr. Samuel Rosenblatt, pp. 188-191; Halevi, *Kuzari* II, pp. 2-4 and 71-75; V, 19-20; Abraham ibn Daud, *Emunah Ramah*, ed. Samson Weill (Frankfurt a.m., 1852), p. 93 ff.; Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim* II, pp. 51-53, 55-58, and *passim*; Crescas, *Or Adonai* II, 4 ff.; cf. Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1948), pp. 33 ff., 93 ff., 145 ff., 220 ff.,

of his utter commitment to human free will. He insists that God has no bodily form and, hence, is limitless in power:

Were God to have a body or physical form, then He would be limited and finite, for it is impossible for a body to be limitless. And whatever has a body and is finite has limited power. But our God, blessed be He, since His power has no limits and never ceases, does not derive power from a bodily form.²⁶

Rambam, however, finds it more complex to handle the dilemma of Divine omniscience and free will. To put it simply: If God knows in advance what we will choose, then we are not truly free. But if He does not know our future actions, then He is not omnipotent or omniscient. Rambam seems to straddle the fence of free will and determinism. He insists that humans possess free will even though God has knowledge of our choices. However, we cannot know His will since He and His intelligence are one; hence, to know His will, definitively, is to know Him, and that is impossible. He can know our choices and character development and yet give us free will by *His own volition*. Finally, Rambam denies that God is the source of evil in the world because He is all-good. This idea suggests a limited deity, even as Rambam's notion that God willingly surrendered some of His power over humans to afford us free will implies a not-totally omnipotent God or, at least, one who voluntarily yielded some of His powers. We shall return to these suggestive ideas later on in this essay.

Albo seeks to sum up the Jewish position on these matters in his classic *Ikkarim*:

When we say that God is powerful or strong, we may likewise have reference to God's acts, in which case the meaning is that He can carry out His wish in relation to all existing things without any hindrance, as a strong man does whatever he desires. And, if we use the word to describe God's essence, we must understand it in a negative sense as indicating that God is not infirm and unable to do what he desires. It follows, therefore, that He has infinite power. For, if His power were finite, there would be some infirmity. . . . As to God's knowledge, it is infinite, and His knowledge is unlike man's for He searches the heart and kidneys.²⁷

Albo captures the popularly accepted views on omniscience and omnipotence developed in Jewish thought, but even he had some qualms, as did Maimonides, while Gersonides took a very different view of this problem, as we shall see presently.

III

While accepting the concept of an all-powerful, all-knowing God, both the Bible and rabbinic literature seem to limit God's might. His omnipotence is restricted by laws of His own making; He is bound by His

262 ff., and 344-352; Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 68-70, 74-75, 159-160 and *passim*.

26. Maimonides, *Yad, Yesodai Ha-Torah* I, 7 and 11.

27. Albo, *Ikkharim*, ed. Husik, II, 24, and 25, pp. 146-153.

own principles; He is not totally the all-powerful deity. In fact, there are occasions when *man* triumphs over God.

Several striking illustrations found in the Bible underscore this point. For example, after Cain murdered his brother, Abel, God condemned him to a severe punishment: to wander ceaselessly over the face of the earth as a marked criminal, and to be scorned and abused by all. Cain argued with God: "Is my sin so great that You cannot forgive it?" God relented and mitigated his punishment so that "all who kill Cain will be punished sevenfold."²⁸ One of the more remarkable and well-known illustrations of man besting God in a debate and God acknowledging the superiority of law to His will is the matchless confrontation between Abraham and God. God had announced that He would destroy the two wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but Abraham could not bear the thought of the destruction of the innocent along with the wicked, and he literally bargained with God:

Will you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? What if there should be fifty innocents within the city; will you then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? Far be it from You! Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly? And the Lord answered: "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."²⁹

Another example is the debate between Moses and God over the punishment of the people for the sin of the Golden Calf.

I see this is a stiff-necked people. Now let me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them and make of you a great nation. But Moses implored the Lord his God. . . . "Turn from Your blazing anger and renounce the plan to punish Your people. Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, how you swore to them by Yourself and said to them: 'I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke to possess forever.'" And the Lord renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people.³⁰

In a similar vein, God was dissuaded from punishing the entire Israelite population for the sinful rebellion of Korah and his horde by the intercession of both Moses and Aaron.

And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, "Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!" But they fell on their faces and said, "O God, source of the breath of all flesh! When one man sins, will you be wrathful with the whole community?" The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to the community and say: 'Withdraw from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'"³¹

The case of the daughters of Zelophehad is also relevant. Their fa-

28. Genesis 4:8-16.

29. Genesis 18:23 ff.

30. Exodus 32:9-14.

31. Numbers 16:20-23.

ther had died, leaving no sons and heirs. Lest his estate leave the family, the five daughters came to Moses and argued:

Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction of Korah, which banded against the Lord, but died for his own sins; and he has left no sons. *Let not our father's name be lost of his clan just because he has no son!* Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!

Moses brought their case before the Lord, and He ruled:

The plea of Zelophehad's daughters is just: You should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.³²

As a final example of man convincing God of the rectitude of his position, we recall how Moses was informed that he was to die in Transjordan, never to live in the Promised Land. But God had, improvidently, made no provision for a successor to lead the people. Consequently, Moses urged Him:

Let the Lord, source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that the Lord's community shall not be like sheep that have no shepherd.³³

God responded by appointing Joshua as Moses' successor.

IV

The rabbinic treatment of these episodes is even more striking than the episodes themselves. In each case, the sages magnified the role of man vis-à-vis the Divine; in interpreting each episode, God's acknowledgement to humans looms even larger than in the Biblical account. For example, the Midrash has Cain ask God accusingly:

You forgive the creatures in heaven and down here on earth. Can't you forgive me, too?³⁴

But the homiletical analysis of the Abraham and Sodom tale is even richer and more suggestive.

Abraham declared before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the Universe! God forbid that you do such a thing to these people. For if you do so, the people of the world will say, 'This is his trade! He destroys generations of people with His quality of cruelty!'" Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "If you think I have acted improperly, teach Me and I will act accordingly."³⁵

An even more remarkable extract is the following:

"God forbid that You destroy the people." Said Rabbi Aha, "Why does it state twice, 'God forbid' (*halilah*)? To teach us that the profanation of God's

32. Numbers 27:1-6.

33. Numbers 27:15-18.

34. Genesis *Rabbah* 22:11.

35. *Tanhuma Vayera*, ed. Buber, 10, p. 91.

holy name is at stake (*hillul ha-Shem yeish ba-davar*). If God destroys the innocent with the wicked, He has profaned His own Name!"³⁶

In dealing with Moses' tactics of appealing to God to forgive the people after the Golden Calf tragedy, the rabbinic sources seek to shift the blame from the people to God — surely a case of *huzpah* if there ever was one!

Why are You angry with Your children? You know that such idolatrous worship is empty and meaningless. Remember whence You redeemed them: from Egypt, where people worship goats. . . . You passed over every other nation on earth and decided to enslave them to the Egyptians who worshipped goats and taught and corrupted Your children. That is why they made the calf.

Said Rav Huna in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan: A parable of a wise man who opened a spice shop for his son in a section inhabited by prostitutes. As a result, the boy was corrupted. The incensed father shouted at his son, "I'll kill you!" A friend said to him, "Why do you blame the lad! You set him up in business in that neighborhood of prostitutes." Likewise, Moses argued: "Master of the universe, You ignored every other land and set Israel down in slavery in Egypt where they worship goats and corrupted Your children. That's why they made the calf." Therefore, Moses mentioned Egypt to stress to God, "Know whence You redeemed them."³⁷

The Midrash portrays Moses as refusing to budge until God agreed to spare the people. As a result, he is described as the defense attorney (*sanegor*) par excellence; he was the one person capable of turning God's wrath to forgiveness; he was truly "the man of God" who succeeded in annulling the Divine decree to annihilate Israel and to alter His harsh justice to an act of compassion. Moses used every device and every technique to win his case. He invoked the merit of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*zekhut avot*); he reminded God that, after all of the nations had spurned the gift of Torah, Israel had accepted it. He suggested to God that the people were still callow and immature: "Wait a bit for them to mature, for then they will surely do good deeds."³⁸ With more than a dash of nerve, Moses chided God:

They broke the first part of the Decalogue by violating the commandment, "You shall have no other gods beside Me" (Exodus 20:3). They violated that law and built the Golden Calf. But you want to violate the last part of the commandment which says, "I will do kindness unto the thousandth generation of those who love me" (Exodus 20:6).³⁹

Said Rabbi Yiṣḥak: At that moment, God could no longer refute this argument, and the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, "You have argued well." God relented and did not punish the people.⁴⁰

36. Genesis *Rabbah* 49:9.

37. Exodus *Rabbah* 43:4; cf. Deuteronomy *Rabbah* 3:16.

38. Exodus *Rabbah* 41:5; 42:1; 42:6; 43:1, 2, 4, 9; 44:4-5; 44:9, *Tanḥuma Vayera* 9, p. 90 ff. and parallels.

39. Exodus *Rabbah* 44:9.

40. Ibid.

All of these tactics of Moses succeeded; he bested God and won Him over to forgive the people! But, what is more remarkable is that the sages tell us that God *wanted* Moses to appease Him and calm His wrath. He had hoped that Moses would fill this role: "Haven't I said this to you, Moses, that, whenever I am furious, you must appease me, and, once you do so, I will be appeased."⁴¹ Moreover, God showed Moses the "path" by which he might evoke God's compassion.⁴² He even taught Moses how to pray with a *tallit* and beg God's compassion for the sinners. In a boldly anthropomorphic Midrash, we read:

In the name of Rav Aha: What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He wrapped Himself in His *tallit*, like a cantor who prays before the ark, and said to Moses, "This is the way you are to pray before Me. And you shall pray: 'O Lord, O Lord, God of compassion and mercy, etc.'"⁴³

God counseled with Moses so that he might pray for the sinners and assuage the Divine wrath on other occasions as well.

"Not just for Israel's sake have I taught you how to intercede, but for the sake of all wicked people," as it is said (Ezekiel 33:11), "By my life, said the Lord, I do not want the death of the wicked person, but rather that he repent and live." Just as in the case of the five evil cities, when the Holy One, blessed be He, counseled with Abraham, as it is said (Genesis 18:20), "And the Lord said: 'the cries of oppression from Sodom and Gomorrah have reached Me,'" And Abraham began immediately to act as their defense attorney before the Holy One, blessed be He.⁴⁴

Evidently, Moses learned his lesson well. When God was determined to destroy Korah and his band of rebels, Moses argued successfully that it was wrong to punish all of the congregation for Korah's sin:

You, God, know man's thoughts and innermost urges. You understand who sins and who does not sin, who rebels and who does not rebel. You know the mood of each individual. You should not punish all for the sins of a few! Said the Holy One, blessed be He: "Well said! I will, therefore, specify who has sinned and who has not sinned."⁴⁵

The sages say that Moses was successful in other episodes, as well, in his career in winning God over to his view. He convinced God not to attack Sihon and Og without first seeking peace.⁴⁶ He got God to agree to his celibate lifestyle so that he might concentrate on leading Israel; he won God's approval for his smashing the two tablets; and he prevailed upon God to add one more day of preparation for receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.⁴⁷

41. Exodus *Rabbah* 45:2.

42. Exodus *Rabbah* 42:2. Cf. the commentary of Maharzu on Exodus *Rabbah* 42:1.

43. *Tanhuma Vayera* 9, p. 91.

44. Ibid.

45. Exodus *Rabbah* 18:11 and 44:9.

46. Deuteronomy *Rabbah* 5:13. Cf. *Sifré Deuteronomy Shofetim*, ed. Ish Shalom, par. 199, p. 111a.

47. *Shabbat* 87a; *Yebamot* 62a. There are other illustrations of God conceding points of

The words of praise that the sages heaped upon the daughters of Zelophehad, who convinced God that their claim was just and that, in the absence of male heirs, daughters should inherit, are apt: "Fortunate is the person to whom the Holy One, blessed be He, concedes in a debate."⁴⁸

One final extract from the Talmud illustrates in mythic fashion the notion of a limited God who is bested, indeed, *wants* to be bested by man. The famous debate between Rabbi Eliezer and the sages about the ritual purity of a certain type of oven is well known and need not be repeated here. The argument is normally interpreted as an illustration of the supremacy of human reason, even over a divine voice. But few note the significance of the conclusion of the tale:

Rabbi Nathan met Elijah the prophet and asked him, "What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do in that hour?" Elijah replied, "He laughed joyfully proclaiming, 'My children have defeated Me! My children have defeated Me!'"⁴⁹

So we see a deity who laughs, who cries, who prays, who studies Torah — all indications of an anthropomorphic conception of God, but, also, a God who is not fully perfect, omniscient and omnipotent.⁵⁰ We behold a deity who is bound, ironically, by His own legislation and rules, as this passage indicates:

"And you shall keep My charge" (Leviticus 18:30). This teaches that, unlike kings of flesh and blood who break laws or keep them as they see fit, the Holy One, blessed be He, passes a law and is first to keep it.⁵¹

God wants man to triumph over Him for the sake of justice, compassion, forgiveness, and human rights. He never yields, however, to injustice, vengeance or retribution. Jonah failed to convince God to punish the people of Nineveh for their sins, even as Abraham convinced God to pardon perverse Sodom if only ten decent people could be discovered there.⁵²

God says: "I rule over humankind. Who rules over Me? The *zaddik*. For I make a decree, and he annuls it."⁵³

Clearly, even within the rabbinic scheme of an all-powerful or all-wise God, there exists a tradition that humans can win occasionally. Moreover, these mythic tales portray a God who not only concedes to flesh and blood, but actually *wants* humanity to prevail so that compassion and jus-

law or protocol to Jacob, David, etc. Cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 98:1; *Numbers Rabbah* 8:4; *Makkot* 23b; *Hulin* 49a; *Avot de Rabbi Natan* A, II, p. 6a; *Tanḥuma Vayera* p. 58a.

48. *Genesis Rabbah* 21:12. Cf. Rashi on *Numbers* 21:6.

49. *Baba Mezia* 59a.

50. *Mishnah Sanhedrin* VI, 5; *Tanḥuma Shemini* p. 11a; *Lamentations Rabbah*, Introduction, p. 24; *Berakhot* 6a and 7a; *Rosh Hashanah* 17b; *Avodah Zarah* 3b.

51. *Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah* I, 3; 56a and b. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 30:9.

52. Cf. the Book of Jonah, especially 3:10; 4:1 ff., and 10-11.

53. *Moed Katan* 16b. Cf. *Sukkah* 14a where we read that "the prayers of the *zaddikim* convert God's quality of cruelty to compassion."

tice may triumph. To put it differently: the infinite God chooses to limit His infinitude. He is a self-limiting deity. After all, if God is omnipotent, He may choose to limit His own power.

V

Was this rather remarkable notion of a finite or self-limiting God carried over in the Middle Ages or did it die out with rabbinic theology? Despite the stress by medieval philosophers on divine omnipotence and omniscience, the idea did survive in limited circles. True, most of the religious philosophers in Islam, Christianity and Judaism formulated dogmatically the notion of an infinite God who is all-wise and all-powerful. Yet, some philosophers in Judaism allowed for the possibility that God might not be all-powerful and all-knowing. The two philosophical problems that led some to this conclusion were: 1) free will versus determinism, and 2) the source of evil in the world. Curiously, the conception of a limited God is to be found in both rationalistic and mystical circles.

Saadia Gaon, for example, conceded that, while he endorsed the concept of an all-powerful God, God cannot do that which is logically absurd.⁵⁴ Even Maimonides, a firm believer in omnipotence and omniscience, was compelled to admit that God is *not* the source of evil and that the only way to resolve Rabbi Akiba's paradox, that humans have free will but that God knows our actions, is by agreeing that God, of His own volition, gave humans free will.⁵⁵

The twelfth-century philosopher and historian of Toledo, Abraham ibn Daud, sought to resolve the free will versus determinism dilemma by arguing that God, of His own accord, yielded His foreknowledge to humans so that we might be free to choose our paths in life. In other words, God limited His omniscience.⁵⁶ Gersonides (Ralbag, 1288-1344, Southern France) went even further. A maverick among Jewish philosophers, he held with Plato that God created the Universe out of formless material that had existed for all eternity. Gersonides specifically denied God's omniscience, and wrote that, though God knows the future in a general sense, he does not know how humans will act in specific or particular situations; otherwise, free will is but a fiction.⁵⁷

Albo, who summarizes the mass of medieval Jewish rationalist phi-

54. Saadia Gaon, *Emunot Ve-Deot*, II, 13, p. 134.

55. Maimonides, *Guide* III, 10-12 and 51; *Yad, Yesodai Ha-Torah* II, 10 and V, 1-5; *Commentary to Avot* III, 1; *Introduction to the Eight Chapters*, ed. Rabinowitz, pp. 205-208, and *passim*.

56. Abraham ibn Daud, *Emunah Ramah*, pp. 51-57 and 96. Cf. Husik, *Op. cit.*, p. 197 ff. and Guttman, *Op. cit.*, p. 151 ff.

57. Gersonides, *Milhamot Adonai* (Leipzig, 1866) III, 2, p. 126ff.; III, 3, p. 132; III, 4, p. 137 ff. Cf. English translation by Seymour Feldman (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1984 and 1987), I, p. 38 ff. and II, pp. 75-137. Also cf. Ibn Ezra's comment on Genesis 18:21 which seems to anticipate his view, and Maimonides, *Guide* III, 20.

losophy in his *Ikkarim*, argues for an infinite God who is all-powerful and all-wise:

We must understand His power as infinite for, if it is not infinite, it would imply there exists a greater power, and that would imply an infirmity. . . . As to His knowledge, it is infinite, and His knowledge is unlike man's in that He searches the hearts and kidneys of humans.⁵⁸

But even Albo is forced to grant that God cannot make the whole greater than its parts or create another deity like Himself in every respect. He can do a physical impossibility; He cannot do a logical impossibility.⁵⁹

The question of evil posed a painful dilemma for the medieval philosophers even as it had long before for Biblical authors including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habbakuk, the Psalmist, Koheleth, and, preeminently, Job. The sages, too, wrestled with the issue of metaphysical, physical and moral evil. The philosophical problem, simply stated, is: If God is both all-good and all-powerful, why is there evil and suffering? Either God is not all-good or He is not all-powerful. But to speak of God as less than all-good borders on blasphemy, so that the rationalist school of philosophy preferred to find the source of evil beyond God.

Maimonides, for example, generally ascribed evil to human failings and sinfulness, and he understood the difficult verse in Lamentations 3:38 to be a declarative statement: "Evil does *not* proceed from the Most High."⁶⁰ Likewise, the medieval commentators interpret Amos 3:6, "When a ram's horn is sounded in a town, do the people not take alarm? Can misfortune come to a town if the Lord has not caused it?" to mean that man brings moral ills on himself through his own mischief, and this is the inevitable law of cause and effect. Two crucial verses in Koheleth and Job are similarly cited to prove that man, rather than God or "nature," is the source of evil in the world.⁶¹ Man may always choose between

58. Albo, *Ikkarim* II, 24 and 25, pp. 149-153.

59. *Ibid.*, I, 22, p. 178 ff.

60. Maimonides follows two lines in dealing with evil: 1) He adopts the Neoplatonic view that evil "is the absence of good; 2) He attributes evil to flaws inherent in human nature, evils that men bring upon each other, and that evil men bring upon themselves. See his *Guide* III, 10-12 and 51. He tries to wriggle out of the dilemma of free will versus determinism by writing that "God's knowledge is not like human knowledge in that He and His knowledge are one. Hence, to fathom God's knowledge is to fathom Him, and that is impossible for no human being can definitely know God." See his *Yad, Yesodai Ha-Torah* II, 10 and V, 5; *Guide* III, 22, 36, 43 and the sources cited in note 55. Note, too, the sharp stricture of Abraham ibn Daud of Posquières on *Yad, Yesodai Ha-Torah* V, 5, where he defends astrology and admits that Akiba's paradox is very complex and beyond our ken. Cf. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1980), p. 284 ff.

61. See Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Radak on Amos 3:6. Koheleth 7:29, "God has made man straightforward, but they have sought out many devices." Cf. Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1951), p. 275 ff.; Job 5:6-7, "Indeed, misfortune does not come forth from the ground, nor does evil spring from the earth. It is man who gives birth to evil as surely as the sparks fly upward."

good and evil, life and death, for "everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven."⁶² The unique statement of Isaiah 45:7, "I am the Lord who created light and darkness, good and evil," is atypical of Jewish thought and was viewed by Saadia and David Kimḥi as an anti-dualistic, anti-Zoroastrian polemic.⁶³ It is worth noting how the sages who edited the liturgy censored this passage, which they included in the morning prayers, to read: "Blessed are You, Lord, King of the universe, Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates *everything*."⁶⁴ It was repugnant to the rabbis to associate God with evil.⁶⁵ But that does leave an area of reality unpenetrated by divinity, a realm of existence beyond God's control. The notion of a finite God is implicit in this approach to the problem of evil. For the rationalists, then, a good God cannot be the source of evil.

VI

Evil in this world is one of the core issues that occupies the thoughts and writings of the mystics and Kabbalists. The Kabbalists were perplexed by the question: "How can the Ultimate God or the Infinite One (*Ein Sof*) create a world so depraved and filled with evil and suffering? How could the Infinite One come in contact with this finite and corrupt planet?" The Kabbalists, therefore, developed the idea of "emanations" (*azilut*) and the *sefirot* (literally, "numbers"), which serve as manifestations of the *Ein Sof* in the world. Evil is referred to in Kabbalah as the *sitra ahra* ("the other side") and is described as the overflowing of God's primordial emanation, or the spilled liquid left from *Ein Sof*'s emanation of *gevurah* ("power") or *din* ("judgment"). It is a demonic power and no longer an organic part of the World of Holiness and the *sefirot*. Clearly, this is a notion dangerously close to dualism. In fact, Gershom Scholem notes that, in the writings of the Castille Gnostics, there exists an "emanation of the

Cf. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, pp. 54-55. Gordis concludes that "not God or 'nature' is the source for evil in the world, but man. This is a basic doctrine of biblical and postbiblical religion which sees man as created in the divine image. . . . Thus, man can choose between good and evil." However, some view the verse in Lamentations as either a question or asseverative. Cf. the new JPS translation and D.R. Hillers, *Anchor Bible Lamentations* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 58 and 71.

62. Deuteronomy 12:26 ff. and 30:19; *Berakhot* 33b and *Megillah* 25a and Maharsha *ad loc.* who writes that "since man is created in the divine image, he can choose between good and evil."

63. See Radak on Isaiah 45:7. Cf. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, pp. 54-55.

64. Dr. Max Kadushin called this to my attention many years ago. Cf. his *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1951), p. 97 ff.

65. R. Yoḥanan implies that God does *not* create evil. Cf. his statement, "The name of the Holy One, blessed be He, is not mentioned in connection with evil but only with good." See *Genesis Rabbah* 3:6 and *Tanhuma Tazria* 12, p. 40. Cf. "The Holy One, blessed be He, created everything except for falsehood and perversity" (*Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, ed. Ish Shalom, p. 175).

left," which has its own ten *sefirot* and is strengthened by human sinfulness.⁶⁶

The Zohar and Gerona Kabbalists accepted the earlier view of evil as the leftover of destroyed worlds. Some compare it to the bark of a tree; others describe it as the dross remaining after the refinement of gold or the waste product of an organic process. Isaiah Tishby observes that the *sitra ahra* and "alien forces" are almost independent powers in the universe, strengthened and augmented by Israel's sins and human evil. And, while "they are all in His power to do with them as He wishes," the *sitra ahra* strives mightily to break free. Indeed, the human tension between body and soul is merely a reflection of the cosmic struggle between the forces of "the other side" or "the left side" or "the dark side" and the *Ein Sof*. The Zohar does not consider evil to be the creation of God, but the workings of the *sitra ahra*, which inhabits this world and can be defeated only by our good deeds, adherence to the *mizvot* and, ultimately, the coming of the Messiah and the triumph of "the side of holiness." Although the *sitra ahra* was initially God's creation and, in the view of many, remains His agent or messenger of punishment, Kabbalistic thought gives evil so much independence of action as to come perilously close to dualism and gnosticism.⁶⁷

In Lurianic Kabbalah, evil assumes an even more striking aspect of reality separate from holiness. According to the Lurianic school, *Ein Sof* created the world (*azilut*) and then contracted or recoiled (*zimzum*). In the process of contraction, the vessel into which God poured His sacredness cracked (*shevirat ha-kelim*). These cracks or imperfections constitute evil and it is man's duty to repair the cracks through righteousness and moral deeds (*tikkun*), or, as another metaphor based on earlier usage puts it, to peel away the husks of evil to release the divine sparks within (*nizozot*).⁶⁸

At any event, the school of Kabbalah clearly accords evil a significant place in the universe, virtually separate from God. In simple terms, it comes close to recognizing the idea of a finite deity.

VII

Louis Jacobs has argued that, for all its brilliance, the doctrine of a finite God has won few adherents and is at variance with normative Jewish thinking.⁶⁹ True, Jewish theologians and philosophers have not generally followed this path. That is not the case, however, when we survey the field

66. See generally, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), p. 255ff.; Gershom Scholem *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 120-128; Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat Ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1959), II, pp. 121ff. and 286 ff. Cf. Zohar II, 42b-43a; 167b; Second Introduction to *Tikkunai Ha-Zohar*.

67. Zohar I, 64a, 208b; II, 119b-120a; 223b-224a; 242b-244b; III 163a and 170a; Zohar *Hadash: Yitro* 54a-55b. Cf. Tishby, *Op. cit.*, p. 286ff.

68. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 244-286; *Kabbalah*, p. 128 ff.

69. Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, p. 77; *Principles of the Jewish Faith*, p. 337.

of general philosophy. In fact, some very eminent thinkers have come to the conclusion that God is finite, and that such a concept of God helps blunt serious arguments against theism.

Edgar S. Brightman, an advocate of a finite God, notes that the idea is already found in Plato and was adopted by J.S. Mill and Kant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though it was the twentieth century that witnessed the blossoming of the finite school.⁷⁰ William James rejected "monistic theism" because it imputes evil to God who is absolutely good, and he tentatively suggested that the only solution is to cut loose from the monistic view and consider evil an independent portion of the world, a part irretrievably lost.⁷¹ Henri Bergson also rejected the idea of suffering as the will of God and, hesitatingly, questioned an arbitrary idea of divine omnipotence.⁷² Brightman goes much further: he rejects emphatically omnipotence as appealing to ignorance, attributing "surd evils" such as earthquakes or illness to the divine, making good and evil indistinguishable, cutting the nerve of moral endeavor, and being unempirical in character. He accepts the idea of God's *will to do good* as infinite. God is *perfectible*, if not *perfect*, and so is man. His approach is one of "meliorism" or inexhaustible perfectibility in everlasting time.⁷³

Peter A. Bertocci follows much the same approach. He takes omnipotence to mean that "God cannot be *forced* to do anything." "Omnipotence . . . is better defined as *the power to do all that is worth doing*." Evil is part of free will that is given to humans, for to impute to Him evil is to ascribe monstrous deeds to Him. "If God is all-good, He cannot be all-powerful; God's moral goodness is not limited, only God's power." He concludes that God either deliberately or, of necessity, left work yet to be done: "Is perfection our goal? Or is perfection in fact nothing less than perfectibility?"⁷⁴

Charles Hartshorne, whose approach is often called "process theology", or, as he himself described it, "neoclassical theism," sharply attacks omnipotence and omniscience. He rejects divine omnipotence, for that means that human suffering is attributable to God, and he rejects omniscience as irreconcilable with free will. "No worse falsehood was ever perpetrated than the traditional concept of omnipotence. It is a piece of unconscious blasphemy condemning God to a dead world not distinguishable from no world at all." He maintains that "perfect" and "changing" are not inimical since there is change for the better, and to be finite does

70. Edgar S. Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950), pp. 276-341.

71. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), pp. 129-131 and 515 ff.

72. Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Religion and Morality* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), pp. 261-262.

73. Brightman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 276-280 and 340.

74. Peter A. Bertocci, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1955), pp. 320-324, 412-440.

not imply an imperfection. Hence, God is limited in power and is ever evolving or changing. If by all-powerful we mean that God's power *affects* everything but does not necessarily *determine* everything, then we can accept this view. Similarly, "God does not already or eternally know what we do tomorrow for, until we decide, there are no such entities as our tomorrow's decisions."⁷⁵

Hartshorne's process theology has won over a number of adherents. For example, J.L. Mackie understands omnipotence to mean either unlimited power so that no creature may act independently of God or else God has assigned power to certain creations to act freely. H.J. McCloskey concludes that "from the existence of evil, there cannot be an omnipotent, benevolent God."⁷⁶

Among Jewish thinkers in the twentieth century, Mordecai M. Kaplan was the most notable advocate of this viewpoint. Like Whitehead and Hartshorne, he viewed God as process, "the power that makes for human salvation," and answered the challenge of evil in the world by positing a finite deity:

The modern man cannot possibly view earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, devastating storms and floods, famines and plagues, noxious plants and animals, as "necessary" to any preconceived plan or purpose. They are simply that phase of the universe which has not yet been completely penetrated by godhood. Of course, this involves a radical change in the traditional conception of God. It conflicts with the conception of God as infinite and perfect in His omniscience and omnipotence. But the fact is that God does not have to mean to us an absolute being who has planned and decreed every twinge of pain, every act of cruelty, every human sin.⁷⁷

For Kaplan, God's omnipotence is "not an actualized fact at any point of time, but a potential fact." Given a belief in the infinite duration of Godhood, it is possible to believe that evil "will ultimately be eliminated" or that humans will eventually, by practical effort, reduce the amount of evil in the world.

Milton Steinberg, Kaplan's brilliant disciple, followed this path of a "non-absolute view of God" in order "to account to myself for the reality of evil," which he described eloquently as "the still unremoved scaffolding of the edifice of God's creativity." Suffering men, suggested Steinberg, participate in God's travail as He gives birth to a new order of being. Har-

75. Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: New York State University Press, 1984), pp. 2-39.

76. See J.L. Mackie's essay, "Evil and Omnipotence" in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 7-22; H.J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *Ibid.*, pp. 23-48.

77. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Meaning of the God in Modern Jewish Religion" (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1947), p. 76; M. Kaplan *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: MacMillan, 1948), pp. 236-242; M. Kaplan *Questions Jews Ask* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1956), p. 116 ff.

old Schulweis and, in a more popular fashion, Harold Kushner, have also espoused Kaplan's view of a finite God.⁷⁸

Generally speaking, however, Jewish theologians and philosophers, unlike their Christian colleagues, have not been won over to the idea of a finite deity.

VIII

Let me now summarize my analysis and close my argument with a partisan position. The dominant motif or emphatic trend in Jewish thought has supported the concept of an omnipotent and omniscient God. At the same time, the seeds of the notion of a finite deity have always been present. Clearly, one can hold to a finite notion of divinity and still remain a faithful Jew, for Jewish theology has always been remarkably protean and flexible.

In my view, the idea of a finite deity serves two critical functions and, thereby, deserves a wider degree of serious attention.

1) It answers the problem of free will by cutting the Gordian knot of Rabbi Akiba's paradox. It breathes fresh meaning and vitality into the ancient rabbinic statement that "everything is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven." Man is a free being, held strictly accountable for his deeds. He cannot pass the buck to God who, by His own volition, has yielded some of His prerogatives and powers to humans, much as a sovereign delegates some of his powers to a parliament in a constitutional monarchy.

2) It helps us deal with the ever-haunting, perennially perplexing problem of evil. The most frequently heard challenge to faith is: "If God is good, how could He allow the monstrous evil of the Holocaust? How could a good and omnipotent deity strike down a young person with a fatal disease?" To ascribe to an all-powerful deity such monstrosities is to demean and sully a good, loving, compassionate God. But we worship YHVH and not Moloch; our God does not require child sacrifices or human holocausts. Our God is all-good, the personification of justice and righteousness. He may not, of His own choosing, control all human events, for that is the realm which He has relinquished unto us. He may not have the ability to prevent catastrophic earthquakes or floods, for they are the cracks remaining in the vessel from the beginning of creation. But that makes Him no less God, the object of our worship, guarantor of our moral values, and ultimate reason for our hope in the perfectibility of man and his world.

78. Milton Steinberg, *Anatomy of Faith* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), pp. 174-184 and 267-276; M. Steinberg, *A Believing Jew* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), pp. 28-30. Cf. Harold Schulweis, *Evil and the Morality of God* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1984) and Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken, 1981).

Isaac and Oedipus: A Re-examination of the Father-Son Relationship

KALMAN J. KAPLAN

OVER THIRTY YEARS AGO, THE BRITISH-Jewish psychotherapist, Erich Wellisch, declared the need for a Biblical psychology to replace one dominated by the ancient Greek experience. He argued that:

The very word "psyche" is Greek. The central psychoanalytic concept of the formation of character and neurosis is shaped after the Greek Oedipus myth. It is undoubtedly true that the Greek thinkers possessed an understanding of the human mind which, in some respects, is unsurpassed to the present day, and that the trilogy of Sophocles still presents us with the most challenging problems. But stirring as these problems are, they were not solved in the tragedy of Oedipus. In ancient Greek philosophy, only a heroic fight for the solution but no real solution is possible. Ancient Greek philosophy has not the vision of salvation.¹

Wellisch offered the story of the Akedah — Abraham's binding of Isaac — as a Biblical alternative to the Greek legend of Oedipus and as a "new approach to psychiatry" (p.79). The core of his argument is that the Akedah narrative suggests an unambivalent resolution of the father-son relationship that is unavailable in the story of Oedipus. He suggests that the moral relationship of parents to their children can be conceptualized in three stages.

The first and most primitive stage is characterized by intense aggression and possessiveness of the parents. The aggression is particularly severe in the father and directed mainly to his sons and in the first place to his first born son. In early societies it is not infrequently culminated in infanticide.

The second stage is caused by a reaction of guilt about aggressive and possessive tendencies and, especially, about committed infanticide. It results in a compromise solution between the opposing tendencies of the wish to possess the child completely or even to kill him and the desire not to do so (i.e., Freud's Oedipus Complex) . . .

These mental sufferings can only be overcome when the third stage of moral development of a parent-child relationship is reached. It consists in the entire or almost entire abandonment of possessive aggressive and,

1. E. Wellisch, *Isaac and Oedipus: Study in Biblical Psychology of the Sacrifice of Isaac — The Akedah* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 115.

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especially, infanticidal tendencies and their replacement by a covenant of love and affection between parent and child . . .

The Hebrew Bible contains many stories on this subject but none of them is so important as the story of the binding of Isaac by Abraham — the Akedah. In the Akedah experience, the third stage of moral development of the parent-child relationship is reached in a completeness matched by no other psychological experience (pp.3-4).

There can be no doubt that Wellisch's attempt to contrast Greek and Biblical perspectives is on very firm grounding in intellectual history, both ancient and modern. Indeed, "Hebraism and Hellenism" are both the subject and the title of two famous "Chapter Fours" in modern intellectual history — in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and in William Barrett's *Irrational Man*. Although obviously oriented in opposite directions (Arnold toward Hellenism and Barrett toward Hebraism), these authors agree that the world (at least the Western world) has alternated between these alternatives. For Arnold, Hellenism represents "sweetness and light" and Hebraism "sin." Hellenism represents "spontaneity of consciousness" and Hebraism, "strictness of conscience." Barrett's view of Hebraism is somewhat more sophisticated. Among his distinctions are the following: (1) Hebraism extols the man of faith; Hellenism extols the man of reason; (2) Hebraism is concrete; Hellenism is abstract; (3) Hebraism stresses commitments; Hellenism, detachment.

Nevertheless, Wellisch's attempts to apply this dichotomy to an analysis of parent-child relations, specifically, to suggest an alternative Biblical view, seem to have been largely ignored. This becomes even more curious in light of the clear statement of the Hebrew Bible itself on this very issue:

Remember ye the law of Moses
My servant,
Which I commanded unto him in
Horeb for all Israel,
Even statutes and ordinances.
Behold, I will send you
Elijah the prophet
Before the coming
Of the great and terrible day of
the Lord.
And he shall turn the heart of the
fathers to the children,
And the heart of the children to
their fathers;
Lest I come and smite the land
with utter destruction.

(Malachi 3:22-24).

There may have been a number of reasons for the reluctance to take Wellisch's argument seriously in psychological and psychiatric circles. Consider (1) the traditional split between psychology and religion, (2) the interpretations of some of Freud's own published views on re-

ligion,² (3) the attempts of many professionals within the fields of psychology and psychiatry to appear “scientific” and, (4) finally, the general academic idealization of ancient Greek life. In 1951, for example, the eminent classical historian, Gilbert Murray, was able to describe classic Greek thought as “always sincere and daring, seldom brutal, seldom ruthless or cruel.”

Over the past thirty years, however, a number of important changes have occurred that are likely to make us more receptive to Wellisch’s approach. For one, the tension between psychology and religion has abated. Indeed, David Bakan, among others, has specifically called for a psychotheology.³ A second change lies in our conception of science itself. Polanyi, for example, has eloquently pleaded for the role of personal knowledge in science.⁴ Finally, social scientific methods have been applied to the study of ancient Greek life, bursting the earlier academic idealization. Philip Slater, for one, argues that the Greeks were “quarrelsome as friends, treacherous as neighbors, brutal as masters, faithless as servants, shallow as lovers — all of which was in part redeemed by their intelligence and creativity.”⁵

All of these categories call for a serious reconsideration of Wellisch’s arguments. However, this aim is somewhat impeded by a lack of precision in his analysis itself. For example, he postulates that the Akedah experience produces “instinct modification” in the attitudes of parents toward children (at least of fathers toward sons). He proposes an extended concept of the superego where the image of man’s divine calling is introjected, in addition to the images of the parents (p.14).

The postulation of a “divine calling” introjection is undoubtedly quite intriguing to some circles. Nevertheless, it is at too removed a level to help describe the process by which “instinct modification” would come about in an actual family. Such precision seems especially important here because of the lack of a consensus that such “instinct modification” could, indeed, occur. Even someone as basically sympathetic to the Biblical materials as Theodore Reik views Wellisch’s claim for a “modification of instincts” in the Akedah experience as a psychological impossibility.⁶ However, Reik’s denial of the possibility of a Biblical “modification of instincts” in parent-child relations seems no more precise than Wellisch’s assertion of it. What is needed to address this important question more fully is a specification of the processes occurring

2. S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, J. Strachey, ed. and tr., standard edition, (1928) 21:3.

3. David Bakan, *The Duality of Human Existence: Isolation and Communion in Western Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1932); David Bakan, *And They Took Themselves Wives: The Emergence of Patriarchy in Western Civilization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

4. M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

5. P. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

6. T. Reik, *The Temptation* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1961), p. 225.

in Biblical civilization, mediated through the family, by which such a transformation might occur. More generally, this changes the nature of the problem from that of comparing psychology or psychiatry and religion to one more prominent in social psychology and anthropology — that of culture and personality. Here the thrust would be to compare the effects of two “cultures” — Biblical Hebrew and the Classical Greek — on family processes in general and parent-child relations in particular.

Freud’s analysis of the Oedipus Complex emphasizes the sensuous-incestuous desires between son and mother and the murderous-aggressive desires between son and father.⁷ These reach their zenith during the genital phase of psycho-sexual development (at the age of five or six). The son’s desires to displace his father are termed by the psychoanalyst, Karl Abraham, the “castration complex.”⁸ Such a “modus vivendi” represents more of a “balance of terror” than any real transformation in the attitude between father and son. One must thus wonder how a covenant of love between father and son, as discussed by Wellisch and called for in the Hebrew Bible, can ever come about.

To the extent that the Oedipus Complex is seen in exclusively incestuous - sensual terms, it seems unalterable by culture. Sexual strivings between mother and son and aggressive impulses between father and son are biologically determined. Given this, Reik’s rejection of Wellisch’s argument for a Biblical “modification of instincts” is probably correct. However, a number of thinkers have tended to see the Oedipus Complex in more social psychological terms (e.g., Adler, Jung, and Rank). To the extent that they are correct, the role of culture may reemerge as a potentially transformative factor in the relation of the son to both of his parents.

The Legend of Oedipus and the Greek Father-Son Relationship

To examine this question better, let us examine the actual legend of Oedipus as it emerges in Greek writings. The most widely known source of the Oedipus myth are the three Theban plays by Sophocles (*Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonnus* and *Antigone*), although Aeschylus and Euripedes treated the topic as well. The myth of Oedipus has been nicely summarized by Gayley:

King Laius of Thebes was warned by an oracle that there was danger to his throne and life if his son, new-born, should reach man’s estate. He, therefore, committed the child to a herdsman with order for its destruction. The herdsman, after piercing the infant’s feet, gave him to a fellow-shepherd, who carried him to King Polybus of Corinth and his queen, by whom he was adopted and called Oedipus, or swollen-foot

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7. S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, ed. and tr. J. Strachey, standard edition (1923), 18:67.

8. K. Abraham, *Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Douglas Bryan and Alix Strachy (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psychoanalysis, 1949).

Many years later, Oedipus, learning from an oracle that he was destined to be the death of his father, left the realm of his reputed sire, Polybus. It happened, however, that Laius was then driving to Delphi, accompanied only by one attendant. In a narrow road he met Oedipus. A quarrel broke out, and Oedipus slew both Laius and his attendant. Shortly after this event, Oedipus saved Thebes from the sphinx, a monster, part woman, part lion and part eagle, who had been devouring all who could not guess her riddle . . . In gratitude for their deliverance, the Thebans made Oedipus their King, giving him in marriage to their queen. He had already become the slayer of his father; in marrying the queen, he became the husband of his mother.⁹

Several additional points about Laius's behavior are stressed by Welisch (p.32). According to Sosiphanes, ¹⁰ Laius had earlier killed the father of his wife, Jocasta. Secondly, according to Robert, Laius was a pederast who typically refrained from sexual intercourse with his wife.¹¹ There are, thus, good grounds to believe that Laius's marriage to Jocasta was not a happy one.

The Oedipus legend can be seen as fitting into a primary type of Greek myth. For example, the world of the Greek gods began with Uranus, who was created by Gaea, the earth. Gaea not only was the mother of Uranus, but, also, his wife and, together, they founded a family of Titans. It was a tragic feature of Greek mythology that Uranus, the primordial father, violently hated and persecuted his children. Cronos, the youngest son of Uranus, with the help of his mother, Gaea, rose against his father, castrating and dethroning him. Cronos, in turn, swallowed his own children as soon as they were born to avoid being supplanted by them, as he had been previously warned would happen by an oracle. However, Zeus, his youngest son, survived, overpowering Cronos with the help of his mother, Rhea, and became king. Zeus, in turn, devoured his wife with the embryo in her womb. These narratives and that of Oedipus himself can be seen to share a number of elements.

1. The father is invariably afraid that his son will attempt to displace him.
2. The son typically enlists the aid of his mother in attempting this displacement.
3. The mother is predisposed to provide this assistance because of her husband's ill-treatment of her.
4. To retain his position, the father attempts to destroy his son and, sometimes, his own wife as well.

These elements seem to stress the social power aspects of the Oed-

9. C. Gayley, *Classical Myths* (Boston: Atheneum Press, 1893), pp. 261-264.

10. Pauly, *Real-Encyclopaedie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1916).

11. C. Robert, *Oidipus, Geschichte Eines Poetischen Stoffs im Griechischen Altertum* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1915).

ipal configuration rather than the sexual ones *per se*.¹² The mother is thus seen as providing the “keys to the kingdom” rather than as exclusively an object of sexual desire, and the father is motivated to destroy the son to keep his own power position. His threat of castration is similarly motivated — to neutralize the son’s displacement threat. This pattern is reflected in the very first sentence in the Gayley rendition of the Oedipus myth presented previously. “King Laius of Thebes was warned by an oracle that there was danger to his throne and life if his son, new-born, should reach man’s estate.”

At this juncture, we must step back and ask some psychosocial questions about the Oedipus Complex. What kind of society is it: (1) where the son is seen as a threat to the father’s position and the father is seen as a block to the son’s development; (2) where the son’s only means of redressing this grievance is through displacing the father through aid of the mother; (3) where the father keeps his power through implicitly or explicitly threatening castration. Finally, (4) is such a configuration culturally invariant?

Freud’s own analysis of primitive social organization in his classic work, *Totem and Taboo*, seems to suggest that this pattern has existed since primeval times. In Freud’s conception, primeval men lived in small hordes, each under the domination of a strong male. All females were the property of this “father,” both the wives and daughters in his own hordes as well as those stolen from other hordes. If the sons excited the father’s jealousy, they were killed or castrated or driven out. Freud suggests that this kind of social organization was altered by a banding together of the driven-out sons, who collectively overcame and murdered the father and ate of his body. An implicit social contract subsequently emerged with the aim of avoiding further conflict. Each of the victorious sons renounced the ideal of gaining for himself the position of father, of possessing his mother or sister. With this, according to Freud’s historical reconstruction, the taboo of incest and the law requiring exogamy came into being. Again however, this social contract does not fit the requirement of a “modification of instincts” between father and son which, Wellisch maintains, emerges in the *Akedah* experience. Such a modification would seem to necessitate a change in the psychosocial arrangements within the family itself such that: (1) the father would not be perceived as a block to his son’s development, and (2) the mother would not feel mistreated by her husband. Such a transformation would make the son’s displacement of his father unnecessary and his father’s retaliatory threat to castrate his son irrelevant. Further, the mother would not be predisposed to aid in a plot to overthrow her husband’s position. Wellisch’s argument, then, rests on the question of whether Biblical civilization was able to transform these psychosocial patterns within the family.

12. A. Adler, *Studies in Analytical Psychology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1938).

The Akedah Narrative and the Hebrew Father-Son Relationship

The narrative of the *Akedah* — Abraham's binding of Isaac — can be found in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. There are several significant elements to the story. First, God calls upon Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, who, God acknowledges, is Abraham's only son, whom he loves, as a sacrifice:

And he (God) said: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee" (Genesis 22:2).

Secondly, Abraham seems prepared to go through with the sacrifice, never fully giving up hope that God would transform his command so that Isaac might be saved. Further, Isaac trusts in his father:

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said: "My father." And he said: "Here am I, my son." And he said: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

And Abraham said: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." So they went both of them together (Genesis 22:6-8).

Finally, God does relent, sending an angel at the last moment to command Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac:

And they came to the place whereof God had told him; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said: "Abraham, Abraham." And he said: "Here am I."

And he said: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad; neither do thou anything unto him; for now that thou fearest God, seeing thou has not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Genesis 22:9-12).

Four questions can be highlighted in the above narrative:

1. Why is Isaac referred to as Abraham's only son, later qualified as the only son, whom he loves? In point of fact, Abraham already has had one son, Ishmael, albeit with Hagar rather than Sarah.
2. Why does Abraham continue to trust in God, given that God seems to be unrelenting in His call for the sacrifice of Isaac?
3. Why does Isaac continue to trust Abraham, given the signs that Isaac, himself, is to be the sacrifice offering?
4. Finally, why does God relent?

Wellisch touches on many of these issues in his discussion of the modification of instincts engendered by the *Akedah* experience:

A fundamental effect of Abraham's change of outlook was the realization that God demanded life and not death. Abraham realized that the meaning of the commanded sacrifice was not to kill his son but to dedicate his son's lifelong service to God. He completely rejected the former dom-

inance of his death instinct and entirely abandoned his aggressive tendencies against Isaac. His life instinct was tremendously promoted and with it a new love emerged in him for Isaac which became the crowning experience of his religion (p.89).

Nevertheless, Wellisch's analysis once again fails to explain the concrete mechanism by which the "instinct modification" may come about. My own approach is to read slightly earlier in the Biblical text for passages both illuminating the four questions presented above as well as describing the concrete mechanism by which the Biblical "instinct modification" might occur:

And God said unto Abraham: "And as for thee, thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee, every male among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin: and it shall be token of a covenant betwixt me and you" (Genesis 17:9-11).

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee; behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" (Genesis 17:20-21).

These two passages begin to make comprehensible the four questions highlighted in the text of the Akedah itself:

1. Isaac is described as Abraham's only son (whom he loves) because it is he and not Ishmael who will inherit the covenant that God made with Abraham.

2. Abraham trusts God because, in the words of Franz Rosenweig, he cannot believe that the "God of the promise" would demand a sacrifice of the "child of the promise."¹³ Abraham must believe that God thus has a vested interest in the survival of Isaac.

3. Isaac trusts Abraham for very much the same reason. He must know that whatever aggressive impulses his father may have will be overcome by the fact that Abraham's covenant with God is shattered should Isaac perish.

4. Finally, God must relent in His call for the sacrifice of Isaac. He has an empty covenant should Isaac die.

This covenantal structure goes to the very heart of the problem emerging in our social psychological understanding of the Oedipus legend. The father knows that the son is not motivated to displace him because the son knows that he will inherit from him. The father's identity is not threatened by the son. Indeed, he wants to see his son develop and surpass him. One of the most significant themes of rabbinic literature is the command to the father to teach his son thoroughly (Deuteronomy 6:7, *Kiddushin* 30a). Consider now the symbol of the covenant

13. E. Rosenstock-Huessy, *Judaism Despite Christianity: The Letters on Christianity and Judaism Between Eugene Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

described in the above text. It is circumcision of the male foreskin at the age of eight days. Does this not deal directly with the sons's fear of castration by representing a sanctified, noninjurious substitute? Further, when linked to the covenant itself, does not the *brith milah* (covenantal circumcision) actually transform the primordial fear on the part of the son into his very assurance that the father's own interests lie in the son's being fit to carry on the covenant? The father willingly passes down the covenant, making displacement by the son unnecessary. The son, in turn, becomes increasingly aware that the father could have castrated him but chose not to, and offered, instead, a sanctified non-injurious substitute as the very symbol of his (the father's) love and assent to the son's right to succession. The two generations have a vested interest in each other's well-being. The son wants a teacher, the father wants an heir.

The role of the mother, too, is dramatically transformed in the covenantal structure. This is clearly a subject in itself and one that I have touched upon in a recent, co-authored book comparing Greek and Biblical families.¹⁴ There does not appear to be any systematic evidence of misogyny in the world of the Hebrew Bible comparable to that which was pervasive in Classic Greek society. The woman in the Biblical family is typically neither vengeful toward her husband nor seductive toward her son. Indeed, the Biblical matriarch serves in a mediating role between father and son. She tends to soften any inherent sexual rivalry between them in the interests of helping select the son who is best fit to carry on the covenantal blessing. Thus, Rebecca assists Jacob in fooling Isaac with a mummery designed to redirect Isaac's blessing from Esau, the elder son. However, she does this not to minimize Isaac, but to help him pick the most appropriate heir.

The Biblical world, then, seems to accomplish a change in the social psychological arrangements within the family such that (1) the father is not seen as a block to his son's development but as an actual help in it; and (2) the mother does not feel mistreated by her husband. Circumcision becomes the very symbol of the covenant, converting in one fell swoop the social contract emerging from the balance of terror between the father's fear of displacement and the son's fear of castration into an intergenerational bond wherein each generation benefits from the well-being of the other. Correspondingly, the mother seems to change from seductress to mediator, dampening any incestuous desires that may emerge. These arrangements seem to provide the basis for the "modification of instincts" between parent and child that Erich Wellisch attempted to describe some thirty years ago. At the very least, his is a question that deserves to be reopened.

14. K. J. Kaplan, N. W. Schwartz and M. Markus-Kaplan, *The Family: Biblical and Psychological Foundations* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1984).

On the Jewishness of Modern Jewish Biblical Scholarship: The Case of Max L. Margolis

LEONARD GREENSPOON

IN 1910 DROPSIE COLLEGE BEGAN PUBLICATION of the new series of the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, and the very first article in this inaugural volume was by Max L. Margolis, who was himself the first faculty member to be engaged by Cyrus Adler for the newly established College. The article, "The Scope and Methodology of Biblical Philology," was lengthy (almost 40 pp.), far-reaching, and replete with citations from a wide variety of sources (a signature of Margolis' scholarly activity). Near the end of the essay, the author paused to consider the exegetical stance of the Biblical philologist and his thoughts on this subject are worthy of extended citation:

I take it that assent to the Scriptural *Weltanschauung* is a prerequisite of exegetical success in the highest sense of the word. And if I may be permitted to express the same thought in different words, only a Jew who knows himself at one with the Biblical religion can adequately interpret the Scriptures. Surely a poet is the poet's best interpreter, and a philosopher the philosopher's. In the same manner it requires a religious mind to understand psalmist and prophet, and only he that is nurtured by Jewish thought, itself rooted in the Scriptures, may hope to master the Scriptural Word in its fullest and deepest import. Only a Jew can say on approaching Holy Writ: this is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone. He must possess himself, it is true, of the philological method and of the completest apparatus; but he alone can add thereto that which ensures fullest comprehension: the love for his own, for the thought that makes the innermost soul to throb, which still lives in him albeit faintly, so that his understanding of the Scriptures, mediated though it be by philological effort, becomes to a considerable extent indeed immediate, just as the language of Scriptures is to him in a large measure a living tongue.¹

In a note on this passage, Margolis makes a comparison with the thought of Samuel David Luzzatto (Schadal), the 19th century Italian exegete. It was a connection that Margolis liked:

Luzzatto in the nineteenth century took up Bible studies . . . His pupil,

1. Max L. Margolis, "The Scope and Methodology of biblical Philology," JQR n.s. 1 (1910): 32-33

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[Sabato] Morais, transmitted the master's zeal to these shores. We in Philadelphia are still under the influence of this teacher's virile zest.²

For Margolis, this connection also had a very personal application; as Cyrus Adler recalled, "he felt himself, in a way, a sort of successor to . . . Luzzatto who was called upon to carry on biblical study with the hope of continuing this Jewish influence upon all students of the Bible."³ Margolis never defined, in any systematic fashion, what it was that a Jew "alone can add [to] the philological method." Nor did he specify the nature of his intellectual/emotional inheritance from Luzzatto. Nonetheless, he was certain that there was a Jewish point of view and that he exhibited it. So he wrote to Kaufmann Kohler, in 1905:

If Christian scholars, like Kittel and Budde, bluntly assert that their exegesis of the OT is, and must be Christian, well then — and I have never repudiated it before my University [of California at Berkeley] classes — my understanding of the OT is and must be Jewish.⁴

In the pages that follow, I wish to look at the practical consequences of Margolis' belief that Jewish scholars and Bible scholarship can, and in fact should, coexist in a mutually beneficial relationship. It will be necessary, in accomplishing this task, to draw together remarks (by Margolis and others) from a variety of sources. The effort is worthwhile, I feel, because the current generation of Jewish scholars of the Bible — and of Judaica scholars in general — can learn from the words and activities of Margolis and because, so far as I know, his name and his accomplishments have never been examined from this perspective. A brief summary of Margolis' life and major works is in order.⁵

He was born on October 15, 1866, in a small Lithuanian village where his father, descendant of a famous rabbinic dynasty, made sure that the boy was well educated in traditional Jewish learning. He also introduced him to a variety of secular subjects. In the 1880's, Margolis went to Berlin, where he was admitted to the Leipnitz Gymnasium and excelled in classical studies. In 1889 he followed his family to New York City and there, in short order he earned an M.A. and a Ph.D from

2. Max L. Margolis, "The Jewish Defense of the Bible," B'nai B'rith News (June, 1915): 10.

3. Cyrus Adler, "Max Leopold Margolis," *American Jewish Year Book*, 35 (1933), p.140.

4. Max L. Margolis to Kaufmann Kohler, April 1905 (American Jewish Archives). This letter is part of the Margolis-Kohler correspondence that deals with Margolis' return to Hebrew Union College in the fall of 1905 (see below).

5. For further details, see Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Max Leopold Margolis: A Scholar's Scholar, *Biblical Scholarship in North America*, 15 Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987). Chapters 1 and 2 constitute a biography of Margolis; of particular interest also are chapter 3 ("Bible Translation") and chapter 5 ("Exegesis and Theology"). In the first footnote to chapter 1, I list other biographical sources that relate to Margolis. Especially valuable is *Max Leopold Margolis: Scholar and Teacher* (Philadelphia: Alumni Association, Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1952), edited by Robert Gordis, who also provided the first essay, "The Life of Professor Max Margolis: An Appreciation."

Columbia University. (His Ph.D., in 1891, was the first awarded by the University's Oriental Department.) The following year he was engaged by Isaac Mayer Wise, founder and president of Hebrew Union College, to teach Bible at the Cincinnati school, in spite of the fact that his primary training was in Talmudics and classics. He taught there from 1892 to 1897, when he moved to the University of California at Berkeley.

His decision to return to Cincinnati in 1905 initiated a stormy two year period, during which he and Kaufmann Kohler (then HUC president) were bitter antagonists. Earlier, these two men had not disagreed on the issue of Zionism, which both opposed. As the years passed, President Kohler's views did not change; if anything, they hardened. Professor Margolis, on the other hand, had become an ardent Zionist. Though the Zionist controversy was only one in a complicated series of disagreements that led to his departure from Cincinnati in 1907, it was this issue that was most widely reported in the Jewish press.⁶

After a year abroad,⁷ Margolis returned to the United States, this time to Philadelphia, where he assumed the position of editor-in-chief of the Jewish Publication Society's Bible translation, which appeared in 1917. In early 1909, he came as professor of Bible to Dropsie College, and remained on its faculty until his death on April 2, 1932. The 1924 - 1925 year he spent in Jerusalem, where he served as annual professor at the American School of Oriental Research and as a member of the first faculty of Hebrew University to teach at the Mt. Scopus campus. His eagerness to accept these invitations stemmed, in part, from his desire for an extended stay in the Holy Land.

In addition to his editorship of the JPS 1917 translation, Margolis is best known for his association with Alexander Marx in the production of a one-volume *History of the Jewish People*. Among Biblical scholars, he is usually cited for his work on the Greek text of Joshua and on Septuagint studies in general, but, as we shall see, Margolis' output was considerably more varied than might seem the case.

At this point, I wish to highlight just two points. First, Margolis

6. This whole matter has been studied from both partisan and more neutral perspectives, on a number of occasions. For a bibliography of published and unpublished sources, see Greenspoon, *Margolis*, p. 15, n. 44. See also Herbert Parzen, "The Purge of the Dissidents, Hebrew Union College and Zionism, 1903 - 1907," *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (1975): 291-322. See also my entry on Margolis in the forthcoming *Reform Judaism in America*.

7. Margolis' travels in Europe were primarily for the purpose of scholarly research. However, as he reported: "During August [1907] I traveled in Holland and Belgium, and was present as a delegate at the Zionist congress, which was held at The Hague. While I found there a good deal to criticize as to the political machinery and the squabbles of delegations, among themselves and with others, I was certainly overwhelmed by the spectacle of the great gathering, the enthusiasm which prevailed throughout, and the Jewish atmosphere, which was dominant in the city throughout the week." (This report is contained in *The American Hebrew* 83 [August 21, 1907]: 376, under the heading "Dr. Max L. Margolis' Work in Europe.")

was, from a young age, exposed to secular as well as religious topics. This was true both in terms of subject matter and methodologies. With respect to Bible studies, it meant that he was as familiar with critical methods as he was with traditional Jewish exegesis. His knowledge of Greek and Latin was equal to his background in the Hebrew language.⁸ So far as I can tell, Margolis was one of the first products of this “dual” intellectual/religious background. The second point to observe is that Margolis had not planned on an academic career in Biblical studies. As he himself recalled:

When nearly a quarter of a century ago the present writer was called to the Cincinnati College, Isaac Mayer Wise said, “We have plenty of Talmud teachers, we have no bible scholars among us Jews.” By an accident as it were, my activity was directed into the channels of Bible work. for my first publications lay in the field of the Talmud.⁹

For the sake of analysis, I have divided the discussion of the Jewish character of Margolis’ work on the Bible into fairly well-defined categories or compartments. Readers should keep in mind that Margolis himself never categorized or compartmentalized his own work in this way, at least not in any published or unpublished writing that I know.

1. Underlying much of Margolis’ activity is the basic affirmation that there is a “Jewish point of view” and that this point of view is important for Bible scholarship and for the Jewish community.

2. A characteristic feature of Margolis’ more popular publications is a sustained emphasis on Jewish sources. This is especially evident in his commentary on Micah.¹⁰ Frank Zimmerman provides the following appreciative appraisal of Margolis’ efforts in this respect:

The resultant commentary accomplished what it set out to do in an admirable fashion: for the Jewish reader, it made much of Jewish traditions for exposition: the evidence of the Targums, the classic commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Kimhi; less accessible material from Ibn Janah, Abraham, pertinent suggestions from rabbinic sources, tannaitic and amoraic, are skilfully utilized. Interesting for the Jewish reader is the demonstration of how much rabbinic, midrashic and liturgical material goes back to Micah (Scripture). It is remarkable, too, how extensively the comments of the mediaeval exegetes anticipate modern interpretations: Margolis will whimsically bracket the name of Rashi or Ibn Janah with Wellhausen.¹¹

All and all, Margolis’ volume was an ideal beginning for a series

8. In this respect, I should note that Margolis’ dissertation, *Commentarius Isaacidis quatenus ad textum talmudis investigandum adhiberi possit tractatu ‘Erubim ostenditur*, was written entirely in Latin.

9. Margolis, “Jewish Defense of the Bible.”

10. Micah (The Holy Scriptures with Commentary) (Philadelphia: JPS, 1908).

11. Frank Zimmermann, “The Contributions of M.L. Margolis to the Fields of Bible and Rabbinics,” *Max Leopold Margolis: Scholar and Teacher*, p.20. See also the comments of Joshua Bloch in the chapter that he contributed to the same volume: “Max L. Margolis’ Contribution to the History and Philosophy of Judaism.”

aimed at those “who need help to obtain an understanding of the Scriptures, at once reliable and Jewish.”

3. Margolis demonstrated a thorough knowledge of Hebrew in all stages of its development. Given his background, this is not surprising, but it did serve to distinguish him from non-Jewish Biblical scholars of his time. In addition, he actively supported Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's efforts to revive the Hebrew language as a living tongue,¹² and he even published two Biblical commentaries in Hebrew (on the books of Zephaniah and Malachi).¹³

4. He respected the Bible as a legitimate and relevant subject for inquiry within contemporary Judaism. In so doing, he consciously distanced himself from two trends that, in his opinion, failed to acknowledge the “rightful” place of the Bible within the Jewish community. One trend was that represented by the “historical school”:

The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of the newer Jewish learning which is characterized by explorations in the whole range of Jewish antiquity along historical and critical lines. Zunz, who with Rapoport opened the new era, began and concluded his literary career with short studies in the scriptural field ... [But] the trend of the labors of the whole “historical school,” as Schechter so well recognized, was to steer clear of the Scriptures and to concentrate instead upon a study of the post-biblical literature and history ...¹⁴

Robert Gordis, who had studied with Margolis, recalls that his teacher was wont to comment with a wry smile [that] he differed from his contemporaries in teaching a “non-Jewish subject,” the Bible, which nineteenth century *Juedische Wissenschaft* had tended to neglect, or, more accurately, to side-step, for reasons both sentimental and ideological.¹⁵

It was within the “progressive wing of Judaism” that Margolis located the other trend:

There are those among us to whom the Bible is a record of the past, not only of a history that is of the past, but also of a past and antiquated

12. This specific support can be seen in the broader perspective of Margolis' overall commitment to Zionism. On the Zionist doctrine “preached by Ben-Yehudah, as he labored to transform Hebrew from the ‘Holy tongue’ to a significant modern language,” see Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), p. 19. Margolis receives no mention in Hertzberg's book, although it ought to be noted that he was, in varying degrees, close to a number of individuals about whom Hertzberg wrote (including Judah Magnes, Richard Gottheil, and Solomon Schechter).

13. For details of these, as well as an annotated listing of almost everything else that Margolis wrote (from scholarly treatises to popular articles to book reviews), see the bibliography compiled by Joseph Reider and printed as the last section in *Max Leopold Margolis: Scholar and Teacher*. This bibliography has been reprinted, with corrections and additions, in Greenspoon, *Margolis*.

14. Max L. Margolis, *The Hebrew Scriptures in the Making* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1922), pp. 50-51. In a broader context, see Nahum M. Sarna, “Abraham Geiger and Biblical Scholarship,” *New Perspectives on Abraham Geiger*, ed. J.J. Petuchowski (Cincinnati: HUC, 1975), pp. 17-30.

15. Gordis, “Appreciation,” p.2.

religion ... Once you have arrived at this "progressive" conception of Judaism, it is perfectly clear and rational that the Bible will be dangerous to your spiritual peace. But the majority of Israel even in this country is unprogressive enough ... to risk the dangers of Bible-reading on our own hook. If the Bible is dangerous to our religion, then there must be something wrong with our religion, and not with the Bible.¹⁶

5. The Jewish point of view is dependent upon a thorough education in intra-Jewish sources (cf[6] below). this may seem selfevident, but, in Margolis' day at least, such was not the case:

If we are to undertake the Jewish defense of the Bible, and undertake it we must, we need Jewish students of the Bible ... As long as the feeling prevails ... that, overnight as it were, a Bible teacher may be created, we shall simply not have the article we are so sorely in need of. In the pioneer days of twenty-five years ago it used to be believed that you might take a Jew and put a humesh in his hand and thereby ordain him a teacher of the Bible.¹⁷

As he strove to advance the cause of "sound Jewish education," Margolis exemplified, as well as any in his generation, "the discernment which comes from long and laborious preparation."¹⁸

6. The Jewish point of view cannot be effectively articulated without a thorough knowledge of extra-Jewish (i.e., primarily Christian) sources:

If we are to defend the Jewish Bible, we must be able to cope with the non-Jew. We must know the things he knows and do the things he does as well and a good deal better. We cannot demolish criticism by ignoring it ... Entrenched in hatred and prejudice, the [Christian] critic will not be dislodged unless we assail him by his own weapons ... We must show that we know language and grammar better than the Christian. We must prove that we also can consult authorities at first hand in regions not explored in the heder. The Jewish expounder of the Bible must be at home in patristic literature as well as in Mishnah and Talmud and Midrash.¹⁹

Already in his childhood, Margolis had received instruction on the Christian religion from a village priest. His knowledge of the Christian exegetical tradition is evident, among other places, in his Micah commentary and in his popular *Story of Bible Translations*.²⁰ Familiarity with

16. Max L. Margolis, "The Bible as a Text Book," *B'nai B'rith News* (January 1910): 9. In another section of this article, Margolis made clear what it was that progressive Judaism feared from unrestricted "Bible reading on the part of the unlearned": "the unsophisticated Bible reader [he notes ironically] will take the 'Zionism' of the Bible literally." In Margolis' opinion, that is exactly the way it ought to be taken: "The Bible is permeated with an undying hope that Israel will be restored to his ancestral home; the pious psalmists sing of the deep-rooted love for the dust and stones of the Holy Land; the prophets dream of the return to Zion; and so on."

17. Margolis, "Jewish Defense."

18. For the phrase "sound Jewish education," see Bloch, p. 56; on "discernment," see Margolis, "Jewish Defense."

19. Margolis, "Jewish Defense."

20. (Philadelphia: JPS, 1917).

Christian interpretations of the Bible was a necessity in his post as editor-in-chief of the 1917 JPS translation. Finally (as we shall see below), his decision to concentrate on the Septuagint may be seen as an effort to wrest what was, in origin, a Jewish translation from the almost exclusively Christian circles in which it was then being studied.

Even though many Christians would retain their traditional mistrust, if not outright hatred, of Jewish scholarship,²¹ there were others who were receptive to the articulation of the Jewish point of view. Margolis met them early in his teaching career:

At the request of Dean Van Kirk of the Berkeley Bible Seminary (Disciples), I taught for two successive years the Synoptic Gospels in Greek, and gave a course on the Semitic Original of the Gospels. It is needless to say that I never denied my Jewish point of view. But it is exactly that point of view which interested my Christian students.²²

Throughout his career Margolis met with acceptance from the largely Protestant leadership of professional organizations such as the Society of Biblical Literature: he was SBL president in 1923 and had served as editor of its *Journal* from 1914-1921. He performed similar service as president of the Palestine Oriental Society and as a longtime editor of the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Among his closest friends was Professor James A. Montgomery, who was the only non-Jew invited to speak at the memorial service held in Margolis' honor.

7. In the modern world, a Jewish scholar of the Bible must take into account the approaches and results of critical scholarship. This was evident in a section quoted above from Margolis' "Scope and Methodology": "[A Jew] must possess himself, it is true, of the philological method and of the completest apparatus." Just a few years earlier, he had exemplified this statement in his Micah commentary, as is clear from a continuation of Frank Zimmermann's remarks:

The modern methodology of comparing the ancient Versions and of utilizing the labors of modern exegetes are systematically resorted to; never is a question brought up by the critical school by-passed or slurred over; the reader has the feeling that Margolis honors his intelligence by logic and documentation.

This is exactly what was meant in the call for a commentary series "at once *reliable* [my emphasis] and Jewish."²³

21. Of this "traditional" attitude Margolis wrote (in "Jewish Defense"): "The German exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures has been characterized for a century by a spirit of avowed hostility to Jews and Judaism . . . Blinded by an arrogance of the most blatant kind, steeped in prejudices which, though decked up in the trappings of the latest philosophy are as old as the beginning of the Christian era, they operate on the presumption that Judaism represents an inferior religion and the Hebrew Scriptures a point of view outdistanced by the Christian Bible."

22. Margolis to Kohler, April 1905

23. We will return to this topic below, to explore more fully the nature of Margolis' "encounter" with critical scholarship. Margolis' insistence that Jewish researchers take

8. Nonetheless, with respect to employment, a Jewish scholar found fewer doors open to him than to his non-Jewish counterpart. It was exceptional for Margolis to have secured a place at Berkeley prior to the turn of the century, and more exceptional still that he was considered, apparently seriously, for a position at Harvard only a few years later. He had more choices than most of his Jewish contemporaries, but the result was the same: he was not able to establish himself at a major public or prestigious private institution. A school like Dropsie may, indeed, have been "a haven of peace to the agitated soul of [this] exiled scholar,"²⁴ but it was not Harvard or John Hopkins.

Moreover, relatively small schools like HUC, Dropsie, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and the Jewish Institute of Religion often took on the character of their president: Isaac Mayer Wise and Solomon Schechter were hostile to higher criticism; Kaufmann Kohler and Steven S. Wise embraced it; Cyrus Adler, at Dropsie and, later, as JTS president, seems to have tolerated it. A Jewish scholar of religion teaching at one or more of these institutions needed to tread carefully in terms of classroom content if not scholarly research. By all accounts, Margolis' pedagogical maneuvers met with success.²⁵ He would have been as at home under Stephen S. Wise (who was ready to offer him a position at JIR) as he was with Isaac Mayer Wise.

9. For Margolis, the Jewish point of view on critical scholarship might best be described as thoughtfully conservative, and it was this middle-of-the-road approach that enabled him to work under a variety of academic "regimes." Never a systematic theologian, he nonetheless expressed a consistent view in numerous book reviews, his commentary on Micah, *Hebrew Scriptures in the Making*, and, especially, in his SBL presidential address (published as "Our Own Future: A Forecast and a Programme," *JBL* 43 [1924]: 1-8). He was opposed to the "radical" or "advanced" school that typically rewrote "the ancient documents in such manner that their authors would exclaim, 'Well done, but it is not what we wrote!'" Rewriting is not our business. We may take it for granted that Isaiah knew his Hebrew quite well. Nor did he consult

seriously the claims of critical scholarship finds an interesting parallel in a recent statement by the Catholic scholar Lawrence Boadt: "Jews will have to complement their rich tradition of biblical study based on the authority of the rabbis and the Jewish interpreters through the centuries by a broader acceptance of the historico-critical method employed by almost all Christian scholars to one degree or another . . . It requires some modicum of acceptance of the legitimacy of the method within the Jewish community." (For Boadt, see *Biblical Studies: Meeting Ground of Jews and Christians*, ed. Lawrence Boadt, Helga Croner, Leon Klenicki [New York: Paulist, 1980], p.8.)

24. Abraham A. Neuman, "Forward," *Max Leopold Margolis: Scholar and Teacher*.

25. The one major exception was his second stint (1905-1907) at HUC. At this time the issue was not higher criticism, however, but Zionism — which, Kohler charged, Margolis insinuated into the classroom. Margolis consistently denied the charge. See also above.

us as to the arrangement of his thoughts.” Critics of this sort described their work as a liberation from the blinders of tradition, but, in fact, this “criticism [has] hardened into a tradition and [is] woefully lacking in self-criticism.” Margolis did not advocate a retreat to “traditionalism which sits tight on the lid,” but he did urge something more positive than “a presentation of the Old Testament religion which winds up with the skepticism of Koheleth.”²⁶

In his willingness to consider the benefits of critical scholarship (in opposition to some of his Jewish colleagues) as well as in his insistence that a moderate, cautious approach would reveal its weaknesses (in opposition to many Christian Biblicists), Margolis was putting into practice the lessons that he had learned in his youth. In addition, he probably viewed his exegetical stance as part of his “inheritance” from Luzzatto, with whom he shared a perspective that (broadly speaking) may be described as non-fundamentalist traditionalist.

10. The Jewish point of view finds expression in a number of ways, scholarly and non-scholarly. Thus far, we have quoted from Margolis’ technical articles (such as “The Scope of Methodology of Biblical Philology”), from broader scholarly pieces (his SBL presidential address, for example), from popular works of scholarship (the commentary of Micah, and *Hebrew Scriptures in the Making*), and from essays in the popular Jewish press. We could equally well have assembled an impressive group of quotations from the over 200 book reviews that Margolis wrote for the first four volumes of *JQR* (1910-1914). We might also have dealt, in some detail, with the Jewishness of the 1917 Bible translation, of which he was editor-in-chief.²⁷

I wish, instead, to consider two additional means by which Margolis attempted to express a Jewish point of view. First was his desire to play a leadership role in the affairs of the Jewish community, to be more than an advice-giver. In effect, I think, he wished to be a *Macher* in the mold (if not necessarily at the level) of Cyrus Adler.²⁸

In this regard, Margolis was not to meet with sustained success. In the obituary which David Galter wrote for *The Jewish Exponent*, he dealt candidly with the “reasons difficult of explanation” for Margolis’ failure:

A profound student, [Margolis’] mind was carefully attuned to the general

26. The above quotations are taken from Margolis’ presidential address. For further details, see Greenspoon, *Margolis*, pp. 122-133.

27. On this, see (in addition to sources listed in n.5) Jonathan D. Sarna and Nahum M. Sarna, “Jewish Bible Scholarship and Translations in the United States,” *The Bible and Bibles in America*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp.83-116; Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Bible, the Classics, the Legends,” *The History of the Jewish Publication Society* (forthcoming); Leonard J. Greenspoon, “A Book ‘Without Blemish’: The Jewish Publication Society’s Bible Translation of 1917,” *JQR* (forthcoming).

28. In all probability, Adler was equally envious of Margolis, for — in Adler’s case, at least — the price of leadership was the absence of time to pursue scholarship.

needs of the American Jewish community . . . somehow, however, he did not achieve in the communal world that distinction, that place of preeminence which was his in the realm of Jewish scholarship. Margolis was able to serve both masters, he could have graced both tables, but somehow, for reasons difficult of explanation, he just didn't. At times this annoyed him, for he felt that to live a full Jewish life one should serve his people in every way . . . Occasionally he unburdened himself. There was irony in his remarks. One detected chagrin, at times even an element of hurt.²⁹

It is interesting to consider other Jewish scholars who have attempted to enter the public realm and to speculate on the reasons why some have met with success and others (like Margolis) have largely failed.

As Galter noted, Margolis' failure in the communal world stands in marked contrast to his preeminence in the world of scholarship. Nowhere is that preeminence more visible than in his research on textual criticism, in particular on the Septuagint, while this work on the book of Joshua continues to be judged among the finest efforts in the field. His ability to sift through mounds of variant readings, so as to group manuscripts and arrive at the earliest Greek text, is still marvelled at — even in the present age of the computer.

In the context of a paper that I wrote on Margolis and Jewish studies, what initially struck me about his substantial output in this area was the complete absence of references to the Jewish translation, prepared by Jews, circulated among Jews, and revised by Jews for at least two hundred years prior to the rise of Christianity. In this context, I considered the profoundly "Jewish" approaches to the Septuagint of two modern scholars — one Jewish (Harry M. Orlinsky) and the other Catholic (Dominique Barthélemy).³⁰ What Orlinsky and Barthélemy share is the explicit determination to understand the Septuagint in terms of the Jewish environment in which it was produced and which, in turn, it helped to shape. No such explicit purpose appeared in Margolis' writings on the Septuagint, nor did I detect such a purpose at an implicit level.

Therefore, at the time I delivered my paper at the University of Pennsylvania, I concluded that Margolis had muted (as it were) his Judaism in order to gain acceptance within the larger scholarly world. But as a sympathetic biographer of Margolis, I was none too happy with this conclusion and I was led to reconsider this judgment by some

29. David J. Galter, "Max L. Margolis — Distinguished American Scholar and Author: A Biographical Appreciation," *The Jewish Exponent* (Philadelphia), April 8, 1932. Margolis was acutely frustrated by his failure to achieve greater prominence in Zionist circles, for he felt that his leadership would be particularly valuable in defining the nature and role of Zionism among Jews of the Diaspora. On this see further the remarks of Joshua Bloch in his essay, "Max L. Margolis' Contribution to the History and Philosophy of Judaism."

30. For Orlinsky, see conveniently his *Essays in Biblical Culture and Bible Translation* (New York: KTAV, 1974); for Barthélemy, see especially *Les Devanciers d'Aquila* (Leiden: Brill, 1963).

remarks of Judah Goldin, who had been a friend of Margolis' brother, Elias. Goldin raised the possibility that Margolis was making a profound statement about his Judaism simply by entering into a field that had been essentially un-Jewish for so long.³¹ This view was more congenial, but was there any "hard" evidence to support it? I then came upon the following statement by Cyrus Adler, which is a continuation of the notice quoted earlier (see n. 3): "Margolis was a proud spirit and he wished to show the Biblical scholars of the non-Jewish world that a Jew could also deal with the Greek versions." I have no doubt that Adler accurately reflected Margolis' thoughts and, as a result, I have revised my understanding of one aspect of Margolis' career. More important, this process has led me to consider that subtlety of expression, with respect to one's Jewish point of view, is not necessarily a sign of weakness or wavering, but, in a given context, can represent strength and resolve.

Through these ten points, I have tried to show how Margolis dealt with three interrelated questions: the role of the Bible within Judaism, the role of the Bible scholar within the Jewish community, and the role of the Jewish scholar within Bible studies. This triad of issues is no less important today than it was sixty or seventy years ago, and it is interesting to see how modern formulations, both practical and more theoretical, compare with those offered by Margolis.³² It is remarkable how relevant his words and activities are to the contemporary discussion.

I am not suggesting that nothing has changed over the past half century or that Margolis said and did it all long ago. Surely that is not the case. I am suggesting, however, that we can always learn from the examples set by other human beings. A careful study of the life and achievements of Max L. Margolis reveals something of the struggle and of the possibilities that exist when traditional Judaism, or any traditional religious system for that matter, is combined with critical, scholarly, or "scientific" approaches. In each case, the mixture is a little different, and the result, likewise, diverse. It is this diversity among Jewish scholars of the Bible that is perhaps our greatest cause for celebration, and it is this diversity that Margolis, by action and by word, both anticipated and precipitated.

31. From the first century C.E. on, the Septuagint gradually became the Bible of the Church, a process that resulted in its virtual abandonment by Jews. The same process, with the same results, was at work with the writings of Philo, Josephus, and others.

32. See, for example, the introductory material and essays in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, eds. Jacob Neusner, Baruch Levine, and Ernest Frerichs (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

Yichus in the Shtetl and Dignitas in the Late Roman Republic

SAUL BASTOMSKY

WHILE PAYING DUE DEFERENCE TO THE danger of generalization, some assertions can confidently be made about Jewish society in the *shtetlakh* of the Czarist Pale of Settlement, established in 1791. Cut off, in effect, from all but their own kind, most hardly able to speak the language of the country in which they lived, the Jews of the *shtetl* turned inwards and lived in a closed community. Toynbee may have described Jewish society as “fossilized” and have stressed that its “host of meticulous observances seems, to an outside observer, . . . to be irrational and spiritually unprofitable in itself,”¹ but (without wishing to raise again all of the well-worn arguments for and against his views) he did not at the same time emphasize enough the learning and scholarship that lay behind these seemingly empty rituals. George Steiner, on the other hand, saw the Jews excluded from other forms of activity, concentrating on Torah and Talmud:

The written word and the ever proliferating but vital context of commentary and critique that surrounded the canonic statement concentrated the essential energies of Jewish being.²

This factor must be borne in mind when we consider that the Jews of this time rated highly a quality they called *yichus*. To render the word precisely into English is a difficult task. Max Dimont has called it “untranslatable,” and finds “prestige” or “status” the closest rendering. He goes on:

Yichus was an amalgam of family background, tradition, learning and occupation, which usually was inherited, but which could be possessed through the acquisition of knowledge.³

The words “status” and “inherited” and the fact that *yichus* was eagerly sought, all strike a responsive and familiar chord in students of the late Roman Republic. For them, the word most precisely corresponding to *yichus* would be the Latin word *dignitas*, which the Oxford Latin Dictionary translates, *inter alia*, as “rank,” “status,” “esteem,” “importance.”

1. A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History, Vol. XII—Reconsiderations* (London, 1961), p. 295.

2. G. Steiner, “Some ‘Meta-Rabbis’” in D. Villiers, ed., *Next Year in Jerusalem* (New York, 1976), p. 66.

3. M.I. Dimont, *Jews, God and History* (New York, 1962), p. 252.

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If one were to regard translations alone, the Yiddish and the Latin words would appear identical, but is this really so?

Among the Jews, despite the fact that the quality of *yichus* could be inherited, one must not think of its possessors as forming a closed shop or an exclusive club. The society itself may have been shut off from the outside world, particularly before the arrival of the Jewish emancipation, but within the boundaries of the *shtetl* and the ghetto the possibility of obtaining highly-valued prestige was open to all with ability. As Abraham J. Karp put it: "learning was the vehicle for social mobility, desirable marriage partners, community status, influence."⁴ We shall see how this compares to the situation in the late Roman Republic. Again, because learning played such a role, another very important consequence follows: in Jewish society one did not acquire *yichus* at the expense of others. For one man to be learned did not mean that a number of others had to be ignorant — rather, the opposite. In a society that prizes learning, the more who are able to achieve scholarly eminence, the better. Here, too, a comparison can be made with the Roman Republic.

When we turn to the Romans, we find that, among them, status was also highly esteemed and passed from father to son. But there the similarity with *yichus* ends. *Dignitas*, for the Romans, had very little to do with learning; it was intimately bound up not with scholarship, but with politics. The holding of political office in Rome conferred *dignitas* upon the holder, and the word itself can even mean a political office. Caesar used it in both of these senses to justify his position in the Civil War 49-45 B.C.E., fought, he maintained, "to restore to their *dignitas* the tribunes of the plebs."⁵ Elsewhere in his writings on the Civil War, Caesar stated that the *dignitas* of the Republic was of more importance to him than life itself,⁶ and then went on to chronicle the obstacles placed in his way by his senatorial enemies in such a way as to equate his own *dignitas* with that of the state. For Cicero, the possession of *dignitas* set a man apart from the common herd and demanded a commensurately stricter code of conduct from him. Typically, in this context it is the senators, the wielders of political power, to whom Cicero refers.⁷ Tacitus, too, used the word to indicate the holding of senatorial rank.⁸ Wirszubski sums it up well when, following Wegehaupt, he defines *dignitas* as either "a political office, or the prestige a Roman acquires through the tenure of an office."⁹ We can already

4. Abraham J. Karp, *Golden Door to America* (New York, 1976), p. 179.

5. Caesar, *Bellum Civile*, I, 22.

6. *Ibid.*, I, 9.

7. Cicero, *Pro Cluentio*, 150.

8. Tacitus, *Annals*, 3, 30.

9. Ch. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome* (Cambridge, 1950), p. 36.

see that *dignitas* and *yichus* meant quite different things to the 1st Century B.C.E. Roman and to the 19th Century Russian Jew respectively.

But we can go yet further. For the Romans, the higher the political rank attained, the greater would be the resultant *dignitas*, not only for the holder of that rank, but also for his progeny. The most prestigious office was the consulship and, as family background was of consequence in being elected to that office, it was easier for one to reach that rank if one's father and grandfather had also held it. Hence the important connection between birth and *dignitas*, which also meant that those who were the first in their families to hold the consulship had to overcome great difficulties and opposition in reaching that station and reaping the resultant *dignitas*. Such people were known as *novi homines* (new men). Cicero is the best known example of a *novus homo*, and how proud he was of the position that he achieved can be seen when, addressing the Assembly shortly after taking office as consul, he said:

I am the first new man, after a very long interval, almost more than our times can remember, whom you have made consul; that position, which the nobility held secured by guards and fortified in every way, you have broken open...¹⁰

Significant effects arise from the consulship bestowing the greatest *dignitas* on its holder, particularly so if a man reached it *anno suo*, i.e., at the earliest permissible age of 42. There were four important magistracies in the late Roman Republic: in ascending order — the quaestorship, the aedileship, the praetorship and the consulship. In his reforms of 81 B.C.E., Sulla had laid down that the *cursus honorum*, or course of offices, had strictly to be adhered to, which meant that (though the aedileship could be omitted) every consul had to have been first a quaestor and then a praetor.¹¹ It was this dictate, together with the numbers of people holding each magistracy annually and the fact that all those embarking on a political career intended to reach the top in both rank and *dignitas*, that led to the collapse of the Republican system of government. The reason for this is that Sulla had made the quaestorship the automatic method of entry into the Senate and he had also laid down that 20 quaestors should be elected every year. Of these only 8 could be elected praetors *anno suo*, and but two could achieve the consulship at the age of 42. Hence, every year there were at least 18 disappointed men, some of whom were ready for any unconstitutional activity to attain the *dignitas* which, they felt, was rightly theirs. This can be seen from a letter that Sallust quotes and that is said to have been sent in Catiline's name and written to excuse his engaging in a conspiracy in 63 B.C.E.:

10. Cicero, *de lege Agraria*, II, 3, trans. J.H. Fries (London, 1930).

11. Appian, *Civil Wars*, I, XI, 100.

Maddened by wrongs and slights, since I had been robbed of the fruits of my toil and energy and was unable to attain to a position of honour (*status dignitatis*), I followed my usual custom and took up the general cause of the unfortunate ... because I saw the unworthy elevated to honours.¹²

Even if some of these eighteen were to gain the consulship later, they would, in turn, be excluding others from that position.

We must not, of course, regard those rejected men as the sole villains. Those who did become consuls were prepared to use any methods to hang on to power and prestige. In Wirszubski's words, "their *dignitas* came to mean reckless and unjust domination."¹³ The pyramidal structure of Roman politics, where the way to gain *dignitas* was to prevent others from acquiring it, becomes immediately apparent. Life at the upper echelons of Roman society was intensely competitive, which is why the struggle for *dignitas* resulted ultimately in the civil war that marked the end of the Republic. It was replaced, in time, by the Empire, where the Princeps, by standing above all other contenders, in effect put an end to these wrangles by vesting supreme *dignitas* in his own person. The contrast with the co-operative way of life prevailing in the *shtetl* is starkly obvious.

Dignitas and *yichus* do have something in common, but, arising from very different kinds of societies, there is much more that divides them. We are again reminded that mere translations can be misleading in the extreme. The penumbra of meaning that surrounds each word varies enormously, and this variation illustrates well the difference in *Weltanschauung* of their respective users.

12. Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, 35, 3, trans. J.C. Rolfe (London, 1931).

13. Wirszubski, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

B.N. Silkiner and His Circle: The Genesis of the New Hebrew Literature in America

JACOB KABAKOFF

THE YEAR 1910 MARKED A TURNING-POINT IN the development of American Hebrew letters, for it saw the publication of two works which ushered in a new period and served as harbingers of modernization in American Hebrew writing. These two works were the modest poetry collection, *Senunit* (Swallow), which contained samplings of the poetic efforts of a group of poets headed by Binyamin Nahum Silkiner, and Silkiner's epic poem of Indian Lore, *Mul Ohel Timmurah* (Before the Tent of Timmurah). Both works attest to Silkiner's central role in the growth of American Hebrew literature. Bialik justifiably referred to him as *Rosh ha-Havurah* (leader of the group), for he often acted as the spokesman and representative of the American group of Hebrew writers.

Silkiner was born in 1882 in Vilkija, near Kovno, in Lithuania, where his father, who was a merchant, exposed him to general, as well as Jewish, knowledge. In order to broaden his experience, the young Silkiner set out in 1900 for Odessa, which was then renowned as a center of Hebrew creativity. During the four years that he spent there he absorbed the spirit of that city, which remained his model throughout the years. In 1904 he emigrated to America, where he was to give expression to his literary talent. Here he eventually earned a law degree, but he made his living as the principal of the Uptown Talmud Torah in New York and, also, as a faculty member of the Teacher's Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Silkiner was a motivating force for the modernization of American Hebrew writing, and among those who looked to him for inspiration were such poets as Ephraim E. Lisitzky, Hillel Bavli, Simon Ginzburg, and Simon Halkin. They were preceded by a whole array of literary figures whose output may be viewed as a continuation of Haskalah and *Hibbat Zion* writing in Europe. Beginning with the 1870s, we are witness to the valiant attempts of immigrant writers to foster Hebrew literature and to sponsor Hebrew periodicals and journals in America. Among the pioneers of the 1870s were Henry Gersoni, who was the

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first to introduce American literature into Hebrew with his translation of Longfellow's poem, "Excelsior," and Jacob Zvi Sobel, whose slim book, *Shir Zahav li-Khevod Yisrael ha-Zaken* (A Golden Hymn in Honor of Age-Old Israel) has the distinction of being the first work of Hebrew-Yiddish poetry on American soil.

The road of American Hebrew letters in its formative period was, indeed, a tortuous one, and it is strewn with many failed attempts to strike Hebrew roots here. By the 1890s the waves of immigration from Russia had brought such well-known Hibbat Zion poets as Menahem Mendel Dolitzky, Yitzhak Rabinowitz, Ish Kovno, and Naphtali Herz Imber, of *Hatikvah* fame. For the most part, these writers were led to give voice to their feelings of alienation and uprootedness. No wonder that Gerson Rosenzweig, who had preceded them and had arrived in 1888, turned to satire and castigated American Jewish life in his celebrated parody, *Talmud Yankai* (Yankee Talmud), and in his well-turned epigrams.

At the turn of the century the state of American Hebrew letters was so dismal that Mordecai Zev Raisin, in a survey article entitled "The Hebrew Language and Its Literature in America," which he published in Aḥad Ha'am's *Hashiloah*, could not but conclude that the future was bleak, indeed, unless new blood was to be infused into the Hebrew literary enterprise by new writers from abroad. Fortunately, the arrival of a number of writers who were imbued with the ideals of the Hebrew rebirth did bring about that change. Various Hebrew-speaking societies, like *Mefitze Sefat Ever* (Disseminators of the Hebrew Language), *Ivriah* and *Ahiever*, sprang up, and new literary publications were sponsored. The old-time maskilim sought to retain their hold but newer, younger voices began to be heard. The strongest among these was that of Silkiner.

When Silkiner came to this country in 1904 he found here the maskilic Hebrew weekly, *Ha-Leom* (The Nation), edited by Moshe Goldman. Although he contributed one of his poems to this periodical, its character was not to his liking, and he chose to send the fruits of his pen to Hebrew publications overseas.

That Silkiner soon began to foster hopes for the establishment of a Hebrew literary center in America is seen from the broad range of his literary activities and his contacts with writers both here and abroad. Because of Reuben Brainin's reputation as a leading editor and critic, Silkiner got in touch with him as early as 1907, when Brainin was still in Europe. From his letters in the Brainin Archive at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, we learn that he urged Brainin to participate in a program of publishing literary miscellanies, to be printed in Russia, and to feature the work of leading Hebrew authors. Although this plan did not materialize, Silkiner continued to dream of establishing publications that would link the Hebrew writers of Europe and America.

When Moshe Ben-Eliezer arrived in America in 1909, he launched his bi-weekly publication, *Shibbolim* (Ears of Grain), which bore a modern stamp. Silkiner was not only among the contributors, but he helped also in editing the publication and in attracting writers to its pages. A number of younger writers made their debut there.

Silkiner remained in touch with Brainin following the latter's settling in America, and from a letter which he sent him in February, 1910, we learn of the preparations for the publications of the poetry miscellany, *Senunit*. Brainin agreed to edit the book, and wrote an introduction in which he welcomed the new poetic talents on the American scene.

Senunit was sponsored by the *Ahiever* society, who were Hebraists who had been caught up by the ideals of the Hebrew rebirth. In addition to a sheaf of poems by Silkiner, the book contained the work of a number of young writers, including Lisitzky, Harry Sackler, Aaron Domnitz, Abraham S. Schwartz, Abraham Goldberg, and Reuben Iceland. It was at Silkiner's request that Brainin edited the book and contributed the introduction, in which he commented on the choice of the name, *Senunit*, because it represented the first serious effort to publish a volume of modern Hebrew verse in America. Brainin expressed his satisfaction at finding here a group of young poets who had benefitted from the educational opportunities of America and who had begun, or had continued, to pursue their literary work here. With all of its shortcomings and lack of polish, *Senunit* represents a significant venture on the part of the group of young American Hebrew poets who had responded to Silkiner's call to band together.

Of the contributors to the volume, it was Lisitzky who became the best known in later years and who produced an extensive body of work. When *Senunit* was being launched, he lived in Milwaukee, where he studied pharmacy and taught Hebrew. In his memoirs he recalls with what anticipation he and his colleagues awaited the publication of the book. He describes how, in order to save money towards his share of the cost of printing the book in Palestine, he walked each day, instead of riding, to the university and to work.

The appearance of Silkiner's epic poem, *Mul Ohel Timmurah*, can be seen as an important step in the revitalization of American Hebrew poetry. For the first time the reader was presented with an extensive poetic work, encompassing almost 100 pages, devoted to an American theme and inspired by the American past. Incidentally, it was Harry Wolfson who welcomed the appearance of the work in a review which he published in the weekly *Ha-Doror* (The Swallow), edited by Brainin. The subject was an innovative and exotic one — the struggle of the Indians against their Spanish conquerors. Incorporated here were scenes of inter-tribal conflict, love, heroism, and sacrifice, together with nature descriptions and evocations of Indian myths. By dealing with

this material, Silkner pointed the way to his fellow-poets who were also to mine Indian lore. Best known of the works dealing with the Indians are the contributions of Lisitzky, *Medurot Doakhot* (Dying Campfires), and of Israel Efros, *Wigwamim Shotekim* (Silent Wigwams). Both poets demonstrated, in these full-length works, that subject matter dealing with primitive life could be treated with sophistication and depth.

The aims of the *Ahiever* society also included the sponsoring of a periodical that would serve as an organ of the younger writers. Silkner and his colleagues had experienced a letdown because of the early demise of the weekly, *Ha-Deror*, which Brainin had established in 1911. After much hesitation, they launched *Ha-Toren* (The Mast) as a monthly in 1913. Silkner was put in charge of the section of belles-lettres and solicited material from his colleagues. On 11 October, 1912 he wrote Brainin who had moved to Montreal, suggesting that he contribute to the magazine. He also offered to publish in the magazine installments of a book that Brainin planned to write on Bialik. Some time later, on 3 June 1915, Silkner informed him that, after the war, he hoped to publish a series of literary miscellanies which would each feature four or five longer pieces. He again invited Brainin to submit his book on Bialik, and reported that he had already obtained from Jacob Fichman a collection of his poetry, and that Joseph Klausner had agreed to submit a book on Solomon Ibn Gabirol.

That Silkner had long entertained hopes of establishing a publishing agency under the name of *Asaf* is evident from the fact that *Asaf* is already listed as the publisher of his *Mul Ohel Timmurah*. But it was not until 1916 that he was able to fulfill his ambition. The letterhead of *Asaf* lists Silkner as treasurer, and gives his home address as that of the agency. A four-page prospectus, which he circulated in 1917, defined the broad aims of *Asaf*, and stressed that the time had come for American Hebraists to stand on their own feet rather than depend on others. He wrote:

For some time American Hebraists have felt a sense of national shame over the fact that in this country, which boasts a Jewish population of 3,000,000, there has never been founded a society for the publishing of Hebrew books.

He further pointed out that, as a result of the interruption in European Hebrew publishing activity due to the war, there was no choice but to meet the needs of American Hebraists locally.

It was intended that *Asaf* publish new works and reprints of classic ones, as well as collective volumes, dictionaries, and educational materials. It should be noted that among the planned publications was an anthology of English poetry in translation, to be edited jointly by Simon Ginzburg and Silkner. The prospectus also listed several titles that were scheduled to appear or that were in preparation. Of these, five actually saw the light of day, including two volumes of Brainin's

writings, collections of essays by David Neumark and Shmarya Levin, and a new edition of Mapu's *Ahavat Ziyon* (The Love of Zion), with an introduction by Brainin. From advertisements that continued to appear in the American Hebrew press down to 1920, and from Silkiner's correspondence, we learn that a number of additional works were planned, including a second collection of Neumark's essays, a book of stories by Isaac Dov Berkowitz, the novel, *Ahavah* (Love), by Abraham A. Kabak, and a book of essays by Samuel M. Melamed. The plans also included a 60th anniversary jubilee volume in honor of Aḥad Ha'am. However, the activity of *Asaf* ceased, due, perhaps, to the fact that the newly established *Histadruth Ivrit* had embarked on its own publishing program — a series of popular paperbacks under the name of *Kadimah*, and that Abraham Stybel had set up an American branch of his publishing house.

Silkiner never ceased to hope for the establishment of a vital center for Hebrew literature in America. The early 1920s were a period of increased Hebrew activity and the heyday of the *Ivrit be-Ivrit* method in Jewish education. They witnessed the establishment of *Hadoar* (The Post) as a daily and saw an increase in the number of Hebrew writers. It was then, that the *Haverim* publishing agency was set up, with Silkiner again in the role of treasurer. This time the emphasis was to be on works by American Hebrew authors and, in 1922, it was felt that the time was ripe for sponsoring a collective volume to be devoted to belles-lettres and criticism. The editorship of the volume, entitled *Nimim* (Strings) and printed in Berlin, was placed in the hands of Hillel Bavili. In it were the efforts of some of the leading representatives of the American group, from Silkiner to Halkin, in both original works and translations. Silkiner himself contributed a section of a poem entitled "*Shekhenim*" (Neighbors), dealing with immigrant life and depicting the relationships among Jews, Italians, and the Irish.

The literary quality and varied material of *Nimim* seemed to bode well for the future of American Hebrew letters. Particularly encouraging was the list of the projected publications of the *Haverim* group which appeared at the end of the volume. It included a second volume of *Nimim*, a collection of poetry by Silkiner, and ten additional books by the following American Hebrew writers: Lisitzky, Benzion Wineman, Bavli, Ginzburg, Schwartz, Efros, Halkin, and Menachem Ribalow. This list again included a planned anthology of English poetry in translation, under the editorship of Ginzburg and Silkiner. The broad program of the *Haverim* attests to the high hopes that were entertained at the time.

However, it was not until Bialik's visit to America in 1926 that the *Haverim* succeeded in finding a publishing outlet for their works. Silkiner was able to reach an agreement with the Dvir Publishing Co., headed by Bialik, regarding the joint publication of the works of the

members of the group. Bialik's collected letters contain several that were addressed to Silkiner in 1926-27 concerning the project.

The first book to appear was a collection of Silkiner's poetry, including a revised version of *Mul Ohel Timmurah*. It was followed by a volume of Lisitzky's verse and by two books of short stories from the pen of Abraham Soyer, entitled *Dor Holekh* (A Generation Goes). Bialik continually urged that the publication program be speeded up, but, with the appearance of these books, the program came to a halt. Silkiner had intended for the poetry collections of Ginzburg, Efros, Bavli, and Halkin to be next in line. However, when Ginzburg's turn came, he decided to part company with the *Haverim*, and his book of poems eventually appeared in 1931 under the imprint of Dvir.

The activity of the *Haverim* continued down to the 30s, on the basis of an agreement which had been reached with the Mizpah Publishing Co., headed by Mordecai Newman. The agreement resulted in the publication of Efros' collected poems and two collective volumes entitled *Massad*, edited by Bavli. Both volumes of *Massad* devoted considerable space to Silkiner. The second, which appeared in 1936, three years after Silkiner's death, was devoted to the poet's memory, and offered his posthumous poem *Manoah Franko*, dealing with the soul-searching experiences of a Marrano during the Inquisition period.

Silkiner served as a model to his contemporaries in his use of American thematic material, in his cultivation of the epic narrative poem, and in his recourse to a purist style. He was well read in several languages, and he stressed the need of translating from English literature. One of his far-reaching plans was a program for the translation of Shakespeare's plays. Already in 1911 he informed Lisitzky that he had received a proposal from Palestine to translate *Macbeth*. His plan was to publish Shakespeare's entire corpus in the course of two or three years, and he asked Lisitzky if he was prepared to do his share. Silkiner was to return to this project again and again in later years.

In 1916 Silkiner again wrote to Lisitzky and to Bavli, both of whom then resided in Buffalo, to inquire whether they would be willing to help in the Shakespeare project. He consulted with them also regarding the method of translation, and also broached the subject of the Shakespeare translation to Bialik, who reacted favorably and informed him that Dvir would be willing to bear fifty percent of the publication costs. He wrote:

It is but proper and fitting that poets who are immersed in the Anglo-Saxon culture should become the intermediaries for bringing Shakespeare under the wings of the Hebrew Shekhinah.

Silkiner urged Lisitzky to complete the translation of *Julius Caesar* and, when he received it, he sent it on for publication in Warsaw to Stybel, who was active in issuing world classics in Hebrew translation.

He provided notes to Halkin's translation of *The Merchant of Venice*, which was also published by Stybel, but his own translation of *Macbeth* was issued by Stybel only after his death. While Silkiner was not privileged to see the fulfillment of his dream concerning Shakespeare, his fellow-poets continued to devote their efforts to this undertaking, and the contributions of Lisitzky, Bavli, Efros, Halkin, and Reuben Grossman in this area are well known.

Silkiner's letters to Lisitzky and Bavli, which are found in the E. R. Malachi Archive in Jerusalem, offer vivid testimony to his unceasing efforts to further the cause of Hebrew literature in America. He felt especially close to those colleagues who visited him at his summer place during the vacation period, and were joined, from time to time, by their younger colleague, Halkin. Lisitzky came regularly from New Orleans. Bavli was also Silkiner's close companion and confidant during their years of joint service on the faculty of the Teachers Institute.

Silkiner never let up in urging both Lisitzky and Bavli to prepare their poems for publication, though he did not hesitate to reveal his doubts about his own work when he readied it for the press. He once confessed to Lisitzky that a reading and rereading of his manuscript had left him with a feeling of sadness, and compared his mood to that of Peer Gynt who, upon returning home from his wanderings, saw in the falling leaves a symbol of his unrealized dreams. Silkiner, too, remembered his many hopes and literary plans and, when reviewing what he had actually accomplished, he was filled with a similar feeling. In a memoir of Silkiner which Halkin sent to E. R. Malachi,¹ he spoke of certain inhibitions which may have prevented him from realizing his full potentialities as a poet.

Silkiner's correspondence and the evaluations in the *Sefer Zikaron le-B.N. Silkiner* (Memorial Volume for B.N. Silkiner), edited by Menachem Ribalow in 1934, offer ample evidence as to his central role in American Hebrew letters and to the position of honor that he held among his colleagues. He seldom sought the limelight, and remained a man of the book, a student of the Bible, and a devotee of world literature. His overriding ambition was to see America become a center for Hebrew literature. While many of his plans remained unfulfilled, in part because of his failing health and untimely death at the age of fifty-one, he may well be assigned the role of the architect of modern Hebrew literature in America.

1. For the text of this unpublished memoir, see my article, "A Close Friendship: S. Halkin, B. N. Silkiner and Abraham Regelson," (Hebrew), in *Bitzaron*, Vol. IX, No. 39-40 (Summer-Fall 1988): 55-59.

Citing and Translating a Context: The Talmud in its “Post Modern” Setting

WILLIAM CUTTER

THIS DISCUSSION IS ABOUT CONTEXT: THE limits that it imposes on our reading, and the loosening of limits which it may invite. There are several elements gathered into the word, and I shall want to comment on some of those elements once I have explored an important problem of context that is found typically in rabbinic literature. In the Talmud, (composed between the 3rd and 6th centuries, C.E.), perhaps more than in any form of Jewish literature, text can be obstinate, and refuse to yield to the passions of readers. There are instances in which many problems of text reading occur within one brief passage, where meaning and means are related to each other. Indeed, rabbinic texts can be obstinate, and exert urgent pressure at the same time that the reader is demanding open interpretation. Understanding the place of context can help deal with these pressures. There are several instances of this collusion of difficulty particularly in the Talmud. As a non-talmudist, I share the problem that many people have when confronted with this body of legal argumentation, but once one has cracked some of the rhetorical code of the material, the rewards are accessible.¹

My comments in this article will center on the importance of context for the management of a talmudic argument. Literary passages often mean more than the plain meaning of the words in passages where material may refer to some other literary material. The idea is not new, nor is it unique to the Talmud. Critics like Harold Bloom have built whole systems around this phenomenon.² But no one has spoken to the question quite so relevantly to my own interest as has the American critic, J. Hillis Miller, who inquires:

“What happens when a critical essay extracts a passage and cites it? Is a citation an alien parasite within the body of the main text, or is the interpretive text the parasite which surrounds and strangles the citation which is its host?”³

1. A helpful introduction to Talmud for non-scholars is contained in the book, *Back to the Sources* (New York, 1984). Note also the various popular works of Jacob Neusner, especially *Invitation to the Talmud* (New York, 1973).

2. Harold Bloom's *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven, 1976) is only one of his many works which assume the phenomenon.

3. J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” *Deconstruction and Criticism* (Boston, 1979).

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Translated into my work in contemporary literature: What happens when a poem draws on a Biblical passage? Is the Bible illumined, or is the poem made Biblical? And what happens when an interpretive text quotes the text that it is explaining? Miller provides a metaphor which applies to many literary forms.

The passage that I have chosen for our discussion has a “double edge” appropriate to Miller’s question. The content of the material, (from which I am discussing “context”), is partially about translation. It deals with an original text and the theme of a second text, and it adds a third text when that step is concluded.

Most of us who teach, or who are parents, or who have to explain anything to anyone, are interested in one way or another in translation. What follows is an exercise in translating some ideas about translation.

The idea that a translation has limited accuracy is not entirely new to anyone who has thought about it. Even the word itself contains the notion of transgression, as suggested by the Italian aphorism: *traduttori = traditori*. The transmission of tradition, we must admit, is both a translation of the past, and a transgression of some of the original and pure meaning of that tradition. Authors occasionally quote the famous passage from the Talmud that: “If one translated a verse literally, he is a liar; but if he adds to it he is a blasphemer and a libeller.” The idea in itself is a delight. We can neither translate literally nor broadly, without committing one kind of transgression or another.

But we must now look more fully or more contextually at this “delightful” idea. The Talmud passage ascribes the linguistic insight to Rabbi Judah:

... But it was taught that Rabbi Judah said: “If one translates a verse literally, he is a liar; if he adds to it he is a blasphemer and a libeller.” If that is true, then what is meant by “translation”? (The answer is) “Our translation.”⁴ (Most authorities say that this must be the first century C.E. Aramaic translation, the *Targum*, of Onkelos).

Judah’s response suggests that the *Targum* is the authorized or canonized translation of Scripture, and that this translation is the perfect compromise between literal adherence to the original and too much freedom from it. It is also likely that the canonization of the *Targum* Onkelos was achieved on purely pragmatic grounds — that is, not because it maintains the perfect tension between an acceptable limit (too much literalism) and an acceptable freedom (too much adding or subtracting).⁵ Rather, Onkelos has the status of a text “nearly revealed;” it is “from Sinai.”

4. B. *Kiddushin* 49a.

5. The discussion on Canon is vast. The sources relevant to Jewish study and other religious study are relatively well-known, but a recent article may be worth citing here as an example of the general interest: Hazard Adams, “Canons: Literary Criteria/Power Criteria, *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1988), vol. 14, #4. See also *Critical Inquiry* (September, 1983) for an issue devoted to problems of Canon.

But Judah's statement is more than a general comment about how difficult it is to translate properly. By using it that way, one simply carries it out of context as a *memra*, a pithy aphorism. It is, rather, one of those statements often found in the Talmud that is two things at once: it is, to be sure, a suggestion about the difficulty of translation for those who read it that way, whether that was its original intention or not; yet, it is more specific, coming, as it does, with reference to a particular decision about religious behavior. It is used here in the context of a discussion on the qualifications of a bridegroom and, in the *Tosefta*, (a collection of material not formally incorporated into the Talmud but often cited by the Sages), for a larger consideration of translation norms. I myself have yielded to the temptation to use this passage as the basis for rumination about what it means to translate; I am more interested in translation than in bridegrooms. In the same way, I might remember a trenchant line from a favorite novel, and remember it without any reference to the narrative in which it takes place. I may even cite Polonius when my child asks me for a loan: "neither a borrower nor a lender be." But I know that Shakespeare meant something else, and I think that even Polonius did. And, before I am satisfied with that sense of meaning of the Talmudic phrase about translation, I am obligated to look at the context in which this notion occurs.

This discussion takes place in Tractate *Kiddushin*, and deals with the issue of marriage contracts. The rabbis in the Talmud are discussing the extent to which a person has represented himself correctly to the family of a prospective bride. The bridegroom might have made the representation that he is *Karyana* — that is, able to read the Pentateuch in public on the days when Scripture is to be read. The text asserts:

Once he has read three verses in the synagogue, she is betrothed.

The betrothal, then, would be confirmed on condition that the proposed groom be able to read the Torah, so that at the moment when he proves that he can, the betrothal is actualized, or made official. Rabbi Judah then adds the comment that, in order for this reading of the Torah to be reckoned a "proper" one, (to count, in other words), the reader must be able to translate.

He must be able to read and translate it. Even if he translates it according to his own understanding.

This echo of speech act theory brings the first phase of the section to a close. And the reader can see that the notion about translating does, indeed, come out of a larger context. Immediately after this part of the discussion there is a consideration of possible designations for the bridegroom, his representation as to having the qualifications which fulfill the designation, and how those qualifications are to be demonstrated.

Rabbi Judah has rendered a particular kind of decision when he says that the prospective bridegroom may translate according to his own understanding. In contemporary parlance we might call this a “liberal,” or permissive, understanding of the translator’s task. But that is, in itself, a label which comes from our 20th century environment, and contrary to it might be the stricter notion that the bridegroom cannot rely on a known version. Rabbi Judah is then quoted (seemingly against himself) from another “context”, the *Baraita*, material which is collected in *Tosefta*, but which was accessible to the Sages and cited by them.

But it was taught that Rabbi Judah said: “If one translates a verse literally, he is a liar; if he adds thereto, he is a blasphemer and libeller.” Then what translation is appropriate? Our translation (see *Tosefta, Megillah*: 4:41, where “blasphemer” is absent).

Now, when did the “earlier” Rabbi Judah make the statement that to translate literally makes one a liar, etc., and that to add to it makes one a blasphemer? And how is this instance like Miller’s extracting a passage and citing it? Is there a host here, forcing meaning on an old text, or does the old text force itself upon our new context? And a complication to this is provided by the Talmud page itself, since, on the side column of the Talmud, collected discussions are available to us of the 12th century Talmudic commentators, the *Tosafists*, who cite Hananel Ben Samuel: He who translates literally is a liar, for example:

“They saw the God of Israel” (a phrase from Exodus 24:10). In translating into Aramaic, one might render it: “They saw the God of Israel,” and this is a lie because the Holy one cannot be seen; but if you add something to this, such as the idea that “they saw the angel of the God of Israel,” this (too) must be blasphemy and a lie, because it would substitute an angel for the actual glory of God. One should translate this concept: They saw the *Yakar* (glory) of God.

Hananel, the 12th century commentator, is clearly concerned about speaking of God in just the right language. And he understands that Hebrew is different from any language which is not Hebrew.

What is more, he knows that the *Targum*’s primary quality is its ability to negotiate the gap between Hebrew and other languages.

The solution as to how to translate the slippery Exodus passage is found in the *Targum* of Onkelos, which developed a way to describe God so that the text conveys God’s connection with human beings while avoiding the blasphemy that people can actually see God directly. The *Tosafist* is anxious about the Hebrew anthropomorphism, yet the lack of anthropomorphism creates problems of its own. In an article written some years ago, the Israeli scholar, David Flusser, dealt with the implications of this *Baraita* in terms of the idea in the Passover Haggadah that Israel is saved by God alone and not by intermediaries.⁶ Lieberman

6. David Flusser “Lo Al Y’dai Malakh,” in *Ture Yeshurun*, #29 (One must be careful

deals with the same passage in Exodus, and other commentators have offered other resolutions.⁷

Everywhere we look to track the source of this discussion, we come upon new allusions and, therefore, new meanings. Does each allusion represent a different potential, a different context? And does the allusion invite us to ponder the clarity of all of the definitions being dealt with in the talmudic passage: Who is a bridegroom? What is a scripture reader? What is a translation? And what shall we do with the earliest text, the *Tosefta*? for there the discussion begins with entirely different problems: the translation of plurals into singular, and the permission to make changes in unseemly language.

Translators, in any event, face heresy as soon as they begin their work. Obviously, the *Tosafist* passage which deals with the Exodus material is working on a more profound subject, or, at least, a subject more profoundly related to the metaphysics of translation. By the time the phrase from the *Baraita* reaches the *Talmud*, it is used, as we say today, "out of context." But Hananel's reading has added an even larger context. The poor bridegroom is now bound by a notion which begins in theology. He cannot translate according to any old translation. And we readers are bound (perhaps willingly) as well.

From this episode we might learn that if one comes across a rabbinic passage which suits either one's intellectual or political predilections, it is the better part of caution to establish first the context or contexts it originally occupied on its way into the final text. Talmud scholars do this with the text as a routine part of their work. But it is still tempting to bypass these steps, and to find in classic utterances ideas that suit our contemporary intellectual climate. The translation notion in the *Kiddushin* passage, for example, fits conveniently into 1980's notions about discourse and translation, and might tempt readers to see more contemporary wisdom in ancient literature than is justified. We must avoid this tendency to find contemporary pet meanings, as scholars always warn us. But scholars, as we shall see, may lose some other sense of context.

The search for context can be seen as more than a safeguard against mistakes by the cautious and scholarly. The context which material comes to occupy in later literature can yield even richer meaning, by moving the text from being apodictic into the status of metaphor. Instead of viewing the idea that the one who translates literally is such and such a type or must use a certain type of translation, we have a rich figure of speech, a kind of simile. In other words, anyone who

in searching for this source, since it is the weekly bulletin of the Yeshurun synagogue in Jerusalem!). See, also, Shaul Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshuta, Megillah*, 131-132, (*Helek he*, p. 1223).

7. See Moshe Sokolow, "The Bible and Religious Education", *Studies in Jewish Education* (Jerusalem, 1987), vol. 3, for one of the pedagogical uses of this material.

translates a passage literally can be said to be like someone who tries to get too close to the pure meaning of a text, and thus to God. Only in Hebrew, the *Kiddushin* material suggests, can we suffer all of the balancing that is needed in our effort to communicate precarious ideas. The passage is also about Hebrew! Hebrew is the language closest to God; and the *Targum* is only one step removed.

The Sages certainly understood how subtle was the task of the translator. But even more, they seemed fascinated, in this instance, by the way in which problems of translation wove their way through other problems in talmudic tractates. For, in spite of my warnings above, this language problem suggests issues outside of the plain meaning of the text: issues of value, transmission and transaction. Finding the proper context is not so simple. In discussing Benjamin's famous essay on translation, ("The Task of the Translator"), Jacques Derrida cautions us:

From its height, Babel at every instance supervises and supprises my reading: I translate the translation by Maurice de Gandillac of a text by Benjamin who, prefacing a translation, takes it as a pretext to say to what and in what way every translator is committed — and notes in passing, an essential part of his demonstration, that there could be a translation of translation. This will have to be remembered.⁸

So, among the things that we must remember is the place of different meanings of context as we consider translation. We may use the word "context" to place an idea in a broad social or historical setting. We may speak of lexical context in order to determine both primary and secondary meanings. A difficult common problem occurs when one literary unit occurs within another, as we saw in our Talmud text, or as we see in dramatic narrative: (story within a story; play within a play, and so forth.) Historical context is easiest for us to grasp, if not so easy to resolve; it suggests that one must understand all of the forces at play in an historical period so that we may fully understand every aspect of the text.

One of the famous instances of lexical context is in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," where the phrase, "vegetable love", may sound like decadence in the twentieth century, but which apparently suggested growth and richness in its own time! "My vegetable love should grow/ vaster than empires and more slow."

Dramatic context is a version of a literary unit within a unit. Its best known instance is the one which victimizes popular humorists with surprising frequency as they try to take potshots at attorneys. It is pleasant to quote Shakespeare's "the first thing we have to do is kill all the lawyers," from *Henry the Sixth*. Kill them, though we may wish to, the lawyers here are nothing more than sources of comic relief and the foils to beloved rogues.

8. Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel", in *Difference in Translation*, Jos. F. Graham, ed., (Ithaca, 1985), pp.183-184.

Three instances of modern narrative exploit psychiatrists as conventions, since patients telling their stories to doctors give readers or viewers two stories for the price of one. With *Portnoy's Complaint*, or Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland*, or the film, *Diary of a Mad Housewife*, audiences often forget that the story frame (patients talking with doctor) is a more verifiable event than the putative event of the patient's discourse. The words in any story may not be the "voice" of the author of the story, or even of the author's narrator.⁹ We all know that; but we do forget.

We sometimes hear claims for values in literature. But readers seem lazy about the big questions — again they involve context: who is uttering the value; what does the narrator feel about what is being said; and how does the author feel about the reader? Such simple matters as those described years ago by I.A. Richards (see note 9), continue to plague readers. Mark Twain's stories have been indicted at times because they were too lenient in their description of values and issues, too affectionate toward blacks, or, conversely, too biased against black intelligence and folklore. Women may read descriptions of women as promoting a point of view, rather than as part of a narrative that complicates that view. And, though academics have trouble taking such bad reading seriously, the bad readings occur more frequently than do the good. A favorite story of the Hebrew and Yiddish writer, Peretz, is "Bontsche the Silent," about a simple man who wants nothing more for his ultimate reward than a roll and butter. Children are often taught this story as an instance of the virtue of humility. How much importance shall we attach to "biographical context," knowing as we do of Peretz's contempt for such simplicity? Some critics reject the importance of an author's biography, but that biographical "context" might guide an exploration into the sense of the text. In any event, while internal clues from the text serve us better than biography, there is a biographical context.

At the "receiving end," (reception being one of the ways in which we talk about audience), the word context can refer to the setting in which the readers find themselves. This relatively new idea in critical thinking requires a good deal of bibliography.¹⁰ But it should suffice at this point to illuminate the notion by the following argument: since the sense of a text is greatly influenced by what the reader brings to the reading of that text, those looking for meaning in the material must

9. For a discussion on the place of tone feeling and intention in the making of meaning, see I.A. Richards, "The Four Kinds of Meanings" in Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York, 1971).

10. A large body of literature on reader-response criticism addresses this question. One can gain some understanding of the issues involved from examining the titles of the articles in the following two volumes: Susan Suleiman, with Inge Crosman, *The Reader in the Text, Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, 1980), and Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader Response Criticism*, (Baltimore 1980). See also: Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature* (Chicago, 1988), especially, pp. 254ff.

also pay special attention to their own prejudices and interests. After all, my awareness of the biases with which I read are as important to my understanding of my interpretation as is my understanding of the biases of the person who wrote the material originally, or the biases of other characters in the text itself.

In certain ways, our Talmud passage has one or another tangent on each of these aspects of context. Even as we speculate on the possibility that there is some connection between translation and nuptial transaction, we have the opportunity to certify the importance of that connection or to reject it. And, apparently, the *Tosafists* decided that every translation is a transaction with God.

Perhaps the Sages understood the subtleties of translation as issues that depend on the proper apprehension of God. Yet we cannot use this idea from the Talmud freely without some sense of its context. Any effort to use this material in the way in which I might be tempted to use it (for example, to argue that the rabbis had a modern understanding of the subtleties of translation), requires that I, too, take the passage out of context, or that I add a context. As a hermeneutic statement, the idea that adding, subtracting, or rendering literally, are equally problematic is still tempting. It forces one to address the task of translating with appropriate delicacy. But the original concern of the statement had to do with a particular problem of the status of a text, and was not just a statement about translating, no matter how interesting the notion is for all contexts. Through later interpreters it became a theological problem.

Were the rabbis, on the other hand, not doing what we do every day after all? On what grounds did they take Judah's notion out of its first context? Does the new setting give insight to them? And how appropriate, after all, was one context to another in the three cases recorded on that lonely page of Talmud?

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Perspective and Protest

Review-Essay by ZVIA GINOR

Eve's Journey. Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition. By NECHAMA ASCHKENASY. Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986. 269 pp.

Israeli Mythogonies. Women in Contemporary Hebrew Fiction. By ESTHER FUCHS. Albany. State University of New York Press, 1987. 147 pp.

THE APPLICATION OF FEMINIST LITERARY criticism to Hebrew literature could be beneficial to the general reader inasmuch as it is a re-reading of that literature from a new viewpoint. As the methods of criticism change and develop they allow for insights and interpretations which should lead, at least theoretically, to a fuller understanding and appreciation of a work of art. The enlistment of extra-literary knowledge is bound to enhance criticism, as we have seen from the perspectives that the sciences of anthropology, linguistics and psychology have added. However, every new method is stamped by an intended or unintended bias and should be seen, therefore, as an alternative, rather than the ultimate, reading. Feminist literary criticism has yet to arrive at a coherent, systematic theory. Torn and upset by disagreements on fundamental issues, this approach suffers from a number of confusions, the primary one being the question of conflicting allegiances: is this kind of criticism loyal, first and foremost, to literature and aesthetics or to feminist causes of morality and politics.¹

With this basic precaution in mind, one may proceed to evaluate two recent titles which offer both perspectives and protest concerning the treatment of the female character in Hebrew fiction. One should note, at the outset, that both works, different as they are from each other, set out to study fiction only, a field dominated mostly by male authors, and consciously refrain from the large poetic activity of both men and women during this last century. Whether this fact represents

1. Peter Shaw, "Feminist Literary Criticism, a Report from the Academy," *American Scholar*, 8/88.

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the need to protest or the technical boundaries of the present volumes remains to be seen in future works.

Whereas the feminist movement produced a great number of studies in France, England and the United States during the '70s, these two titles are basically the first to undertake Hebrew literature, although both were written and published in the United States and are not yet available to the Israeli Hebrew reader. Only in the spring of 1988 did Israel see, for the first time, a conference of literary scholars and authors that was dedicated to the subject of "The Literature of Women" (notice the ambiguity of the terminology, which, indeed, was reflected at the conference, wavering among women writers, female characters in fiction, and the inclusion or exclusion of books written by women in the so-called "canon" of Hebrew literature). Thus, these books are welcomed as pioneering the field, inhabiting the empty shelf which is soon to be stocked with specific readings of individual women authors like Dvora Baron and the poet, Esther Rabb.

Even in the writing of this review the issue of practical criticism finds itself entangled in the plight of women, Jewish and not Jewish, who, in their attempt to rectify a traditional error make a case which is, by its very nature, extra-literary. It is important, therefore, to evaluate these two works in the light of their contribution to the study of literature, rather than in terms of their basic allegiance to the ulterior social-political agenda.

Nehama Aschkenasy, the Director of the program of Judaic studies and Middle Eastern Affairs at the University of Connecticut, presents a broad and encompassing survey of feminine images in the Hebraic literary tradition, following their premiere appearances in the Bible and their metamorphosis through the Midrash, the literature of mysticism, Hasidic tales, and on to current fiction. She creates a gallery of prototypes and social positions of women like Dinah, Hannah and Ruth, and purports to study their evolution, variations, mutations, and expansions throughout the corpus of Jewish literature. By painstakingly suggesting new readings of the initial biblical text, and analyzing the recycling in later periods, Ms. Aschkenasy organizes them into a sort of linear progression. Such a reading implies a view of Jewish literature as a progressing continuum, in which each step is a product of its predecessor.

Prototype or Archetype — The texts chosen by Ms. Aschkenasy are those which either introduce a new perspective on an ancient female figure, or introduce a new fictional creation which is revealed to include an earlier prototype in its construct. The variety of feminine experiences in Hebrew literature seems to have a common feature, says Ms. Aschkenasy, which is the depiction of women as "the other." Beginning with the *Sitra Ahra*, the "other side," which encompasses the forces of darkness in man and in the universe, and continuing through the so-

ciological "other" (as the cause for sin or as the symbols of virtue), women were viewed as an entity apart from the male world. This common element shifted and changed, however, in reaction to the events of Jewish history, when Jews themselves were considered "the other" by the Gentiles.

There is no denial that the Bible displays an underlying patriarchal orientation, reflecting a male dominant world view as well as social system. But it would be simplistic to say that the Bible deliberately promotes male dominion and female subordination (p. 9).

Ms. Aschkenasy claims that Biblical law neither created nor championed male supremacy, but merely responded to a given reality. By offering a close and a fresh reading of many biblical tales, she points out the existence of both male chauvinistic attitudes as well as egalitarian attitudes in the Bible. In fact, it is when the biblical stories are compared with contemporaneous texts (such as Gilgamesh), or with later texts which comment on them, that its non-sexist bent is discovered.

Not so with the literature of the Midrash, which takes the biblical Eve, presented as an agent of civilization, and reintroduces her as a "retarding element," corrupting and debasing life. It is hard to say "that the rabbinic Midrash lacks sympathy for women, but its main orientation is clearly patriarchal" (p. 16).

The Kabbalah, however, reveals a paradoxical attitude toward women; on the one side, the deity is expanded to include the Shekhinah, the feminine element in God, while, on the other side, women are seen as having a demonic quality. This paradox is explained by Ms. Aschkenasy in light of the Kabbalistic, ultra-realistic view of the world, where women were used as symbols of the cosmological and the psychological "other," including both the sublime and the debased.

In the next historical stage of Jewish literature, the medieval Golden Age of Hebrew poetry, women seem to have been regarded as human beings, described as flesh and blood figures, as the subject of love and eros, much in the tradition of the romantic poetry of Arabic Spain. However, the author points out, reducing women to their sexual function is only a variation of the previous attitude.

As literature was produced exclusively by men, the portrayal of women as "other" remains unchanged. This is true in the Responsa literature, where they become the objects of legal discussion, and in later Hasidic literature where women are divested of humanity and invested with abstract theological concepts, cosmological powers, and psychological forces within men. It is only during the Enlightenment period that female figures begin to appear as life-size, but, alas, only as agents of the writers' ideology; they remain as literary characters and are, generally, flat.

Eve's odyssey into the modern era opens up possibilities above and beyond her traditional sub-human or larger-than-human dimensions.

Not yet totally liberated from these submerged images, modern Hebrew writers, male and female, tend to portray women as the paradigm for Israel — as the metamorphosis of the biblical Zion, mother, daughter, or land. However, the modern women protagonists are redeemed from their traditional secondary literary role and are portrayed as seeking individual redemption, as embarking on self-expression and self-assertion. Eve's journey is not complete, concludes Ms. Aschkenasy, but she has definitely escaped from the cultural silence and the self-imposed segregation which resulted from it. "At the same time, the tension between earlier myths and new realities becomes the challenge that awaits both male and female writers" (p. 256).

Many of the modern literary works that are cited and analyzed by Ms. Aschkenasy are also interpreted by Esther Fuchs. While the first presents modern Hebrew literature in a historical progression and the images of Eve on a scale of metamorphosis, Ms. Fuchs focuses on the contemporary. Their readings, therefore, differ in both purpose and conclusion. While Ms. Aschkenasy offers a perspective, Ms. Fuchs offers a protest against the blind spots and the conscious attempts at trivialization and exclusion of Israeli women authors from the canon. The books also differ by temperament, implementation, conviction, and degree. To the student of literature and for the general reader, *Eve's Journey* would be refreshing and enlightening reading. To the critics of Jewish literature, *Israeli Mythogynies* is a challenging call for a re-evaluation on the basis of a strong "new criticism" approach and a political commitment. It is a work that engages in the long-overdue battle against the neglect of women as protagonists, as authors, and as critics.

In her most eloquent introduction, Ms. Fuchs describes the field of Hebrew Literary Criticism as resisting feminist political criticism, holding a dismissive attitude toward feminist criticism and considering the sexual politics metaphor only in its relevance to the national one, thus reducing the works to a possible allegorical interpretation. Women authors are excluded from anthologies, even in translations, creating the impression that they do not exist or are devoid of merit. One of the explanations offered by Ms. Fuchs suggests that feminist critique of major authors is perceived as threatening "because a radical feminist inquiry is likely to point up the valuative contingencies underlying the formation of the canon" (p. 8).

The main body of her work consists of an analysis of the characteristics of the so called "generation of statehood," as distinguished from its predecessor, "The Palmah Generation," and is followed by an interpretation of A.B. Yehoshua's and Amos Oz's feminine characters, leading to the "re-visioning" of Amalia Kahana-Carmon.

In addition to her very precise style and scientific terminology, Ms. Fuchs creates neologisms for her underlying ideology. The poignancy of her argument is nurtured by the very fact that her work focuses

on current literary activities in modern Israel where one assumes that traditional female images would be abandoned and rejected, just as so many other traditional concepts were. She points out the thematic transformations from the socialist-realist "engaged" literature of the fifties to the personal, universal and subjective "New Wave." Yehoshua and Oz, representing the next generation, who employ ambiguity and artistic allegory, actually have not modified the previous models of feminine representation: "What served as an allegorical degenerating society were gynecologies of mad, materialistic and hedonistic women bent on the destruction of the male protagonist or the natural self" (p. 14).

If the male protagonist of the previous generation was absorbed in national dilemmas, the New Wave male protagonists struggle with existential ones. Yet, in neither case is the woman a part of these struggles. Whether she functions as wife or lover, she does not partake in the meaningful or fundamental issues of the historical and problematic situation of modern Israel.

A.B. Yehoshua, focusing on the private sphere, continues some of the Palmah Generation traditions in combining the narrative art form with social criticism. His women are passive, male-dependent, unable to think. The role of women, then, remains in an auxiliary status. Although his women are less stereotypical and less marginal than others, they are still a product of what Ms. Fuchs calls "the androcentric imagination" inasmuch as they are attached to the domestic sphere and are not involved in the "meaning" of existence.

Amos Oz, whose world-view is defined as perceiving a dialectic between civilization and nature, or culture and chaos, identifies women with nature and chaos. If his women characters are in any significant way different from Yehoshua's it is because they are viewed as "others" also in the political sense.

There is, however, a unique aspect in Oz's gyniconology that reflects a specifically Israeli set of anxieties and preoccupations. His heroines are . . . not merely the traitors of their husbands and children; they also betray their country. . . . Woman emblemizes the self destructive impulse which Amos Oz perceives to be Israel's real problem (pp. 84, 85).

What Ms. Fuchs suggests as a "genographic re-vision" is the rather celebrated work of Israel's foremost woman author, Amalia Kahana-Carmon. Despite the recognition that she has received, the critical consensus focuses on her style, her "how," and is reticent about her "what." In Ms. Fuchs' theory, this critical ambivalence is related to the conventional identification of universality with masculinity; thus, Kahana-Carmon's work, which is feminine, is secondary. Her interest in traditional female role models as literary objects places her on the path already paved by Dvora Baron and others. However, this tendency of Ms. Fuchs to see the literary tradition in terms of its author's gender

may be a dangerous fallacy.² Kahana-Garmon rejected the heroic model of the Palmah Generation yet did not espouse the ironic or symbolic approach of the New Wave writers. Her work stands out, therefore, as a challenge to the “androcentric gyniconology of the other.”

By restoring conscience and consciousness to the mimetic aspect of the female image and by studying its complexities, she is challenging the androcentric tendency to present woman as a void, a sexual object, or a male adjunct (p. 92).

In a fascinating comparison between Noa Talmon and Hana Gonen, characters created by Kahana-Carmon and Amos Oz respectively, Ms. Fuchs presents these authors' viewpoints (sympathetic vs. ironic), stressing the male oriented tendency to regard women as having an inherent disorder which comes with their gender; thus, the psychological growth of the heroine is ignored as a possible explanation for her neurosis.

By focusing on these three authors, Esther Fuchs herself introduces a re-visionist theory of the “subtly implied” dismissive attitude towards women authors in the Hebrew literary academy. She actually sounds a battle cry against the established situation and, particularly, against the explicit declaration of the poet, David Avidan, whose “phallocratic assumptions about the alleged supremacy of the male unity” have recently shattered the literary community.

The fundamental question which arises from this study is whether men are at all capable of presenting a non-androcentric portrayal of women. Or, perhaps, whether women authors can represent a non-androcentric portrayal of men. In other words, the benefits of this approach to literature are undoubted so long as we do not become the victims of our own viewpoint, so long as we test the theory for all human possibilities. As it is, we have not seen in any of these books an example of what Ms. Fuchs calls “pluralistic” expression, unless it was written by a female. If this is, indeed, the ultimate conclusion, we are, then, entrapped on many levels. The field, however, is still new and open to the expansion of this approach. It is to be hoped that this will be achieved by a variety of critical methodologies which could insure “pluralism” or, at the very least, a dialogue.

2. Ibid.

The Bible As Poetry

Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation. By HAROLD FISCH. Bloomington and Indianapolis. Indiana University Press, 1988. 205 pp.

Reviewed by EDWARD L. GREENSTEIN

MORE AND more, it would seem, the Bible has been coopted by university professors of English and comparative literature as the province of the academic literary critic. The Bible can be read as a classic of world literature, and so it is read. Courses in the Bible as literature are more often taught by scholars trained in Western rather than Near Eastern studies. While this phenomenon may benefit the specialized field of Biblical research by helping to sensitize it to the rhetorical workings of Scripture, it may also contribute to the utter secularization of the Bible and to its distortion by assimilating it to all other literature.

Harold Fisch, himself a professor of English and comparative literature at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, and a traditional Jew, has composed an exceedingly elegant, though polemical, book, insisting that the theological and didactic character of the Hebrew Bible be acknowledged by any serious reader. He does not go as far as some would to deny that the Bible is literature at all. Rather, Fisch regards the Bible on the analogy of Mordecai, the Jewish hero of *The Scroll of Esther*. Mordecai is accorded an honored place in the royal court of Persia. Yet, he stands apart as alien and other, distinguished by his commitment to God above king. So, too, does the Bible deliver an urgent message about God and the covenant with Israel beyond any

concern otherwise to edify and delight.

In a word, the Bible is poetry — by which Fisch means all that is literary — but poetry with a purpose. At a time when critics increasingly understand that literature and the stuff of which it is made, language, possess only relative truth and tentative meaning, Fisch reads the Bible in opposition to this tendency. Fisch, too, works in literary theory. But rather than conclude from the vagaries of language that no meaning inherently exists, he uses the currency of contemporary literary theory, deftly handling such recent mintings as deconstruction and intertextuality, to purchase theological presence in Scripture. The Bible inescapably uses art, literature, as a means to “knowledge.” But, at the same time “it also points just as surely to the limits of art, the importance of poetry” (p. 101). The Bible uses, but then subverts, literature in order to convey not that there is no meaning but that there is only meaning that transcends the language of texts.

Fisch constructs his book as a series of interpretive readings, arranging his chapters in sequence to build up a point. The thesis, which occurs as a kind of refrain in each succeeding chapter, is that while the Bible exhibits features similar to those of other (that is, Western) literature, it deviates from, or undermines, the genres typical of other literature according to its theological instincts and covenantal orientation. *The Scroll of Esther* undoes the (hypothetical) royal epic that it deconstructs. The Bible places holiness above beauty, as in *Ruth* and in the construction of the *mishkan*, the “Dwelling” of God in the Israelite camp. Fisch harks back to a long fashionable opposition by which the Hebrew Bible is the antithesis of Greek values and their ramifications in Western culture. As Haman says in *The Esther Scroll*: the

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Jews have ways that are essentially different from those of other peoples.

Job eschews the hellenistic penchant for closure and blunts its thrust as a true tragedy by affirming life as a value in the end. The prophetic exercise of memory that is Moses' song in *Deuteronomy* 32 inverts the expectations of a pastoral. *The Song of Songs* is not only an allegory, but it suggests a number of allegorical interpretations. It is not a dream song but an "aborted dream poem invaded by the sense of historical time" (p. 100). By addressing God in quasi-dialogical fashion and expressing a collective Israelite sensibility rather than a purely individual, introspective one, the Psalms constitute not the Bible's version of lyric poetry but its own distinctive "covenantal discourse" (p. 118). The book of the prophet Hosea presents a welter of wordplay and an ineluctable incoherence that dispels any illusion of an objective "Aristotelian" order (p. 138). Finally, in Fisch's reading, the Bible's most ostensibly Greek writer, Qohelet (*Ecclesiastes*), turns out to be not a supreme ironist who sees no ultimate value in life but a non-ironist who finds the search for meaning in God's world the vital principle of existence.

There is a pervasive tension in Fisch's book between medium and message. While his literary method allows for creative inversion and selective decentering (reversing the traditional definitions of center and margin, inside and outside), his theological conclusions — and virtually every chapter ends with a religious lesson — are predictable. In stressing the pious message of *Job*, Fisch focuses on the book's dénouement, where the hero is given a new lease on life through a new set of children. *Job*, in Fisch's own comparison, is like a survivor of the *Shoah* who rebuilds his family. No attention is paid to the open-

ing chapters of *Job*, in which we witness a God who, for reasons that can hardly be defended as moral, permits the malign Satan to torment *Job* and kill off his children. While Fisch can invoke God's speech from the whirlwind as an answer to *Job* in form if not in content, another reader can, with equal justification, contend that God evades *Job*'s challenge.

Similarly, the literary theories on which Fisch draws grant a high degree of creativity to the reader, who is free to associate and construct meaning in personally meaningful ways. Fisch, himself, explicitly encourages active reading. At the same time, however, he writes of how the Biblical text directs the reading process, demanding certain lines of interpretation (see, e.g., pp. 90-91, where, for Fisch, *The Song of Songs* seems to say: "read me as a simile"). Fisch's theological and literary world views merge. When the Torah and prophets say that Israel must "hear" them, as emblemized in the cry *Shema Yisra'el!*, Fisch cannot image a reader free enough to resist disbelief. "The text seizes us even against our will," he writes (p. 49).

A recent book by the Biblicist, Robert A. Oden, Jr., *The Bible Without Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), demonstrates that, contra Fisch, one can resist the theological appeal of Scripture and read it as an anthropologist if one wishes. Fisch's argument that the Hebrew Bible is altogether different in kind from other literature may also fail to convince students of the Ancient Near East, where one finds psalms (e.g., Babylonian prayers), love songs (such as those from Egypt), and even historiography (compare, e.g., the Moabite inscription of King Mesha with the *Book of Kings*) that resemble the ideas as well as the forms of their Biblical counterparts. Neverthe-

less, Fisch may, according to any postmodern position, choose to read the Hebrew Bible with a traditionalist's — and, one might add, a Zionist's — sympathies. His dynamic analyses of various chapters of Hebrew narrative and verse, together with such books as Robert Alter's, mark a welcome use of literary criticism for articulating personal, ethical, and spiritual significance.

Christian, Jew, and Heaven Too?

The Intermarriage Handbook. A Guide for Jews and Christians. By JUDY PETSONK and JIM REMSEN. New York. William Morrow, 416 pp.

Happily Intermarried. Authoritative Advice for a Joyous Jewish-Christian Marriage. By RABBI ROY A. ROSENBERG, FATHER PETER MEEHAN and REV. JOHN PAYNE. New York. Macmillan Publishing Co., 246 pp.

Reviewed by GUNTER HIRSCHBERG

FEW SUBJECTS in Jewish life are looked upon with greater concern and are emotionally more inflammable than intermarriage. The concern pervades all segments of the Jewish community. Parents, even those whose Jewish affiliations, let alone practices, are otherwise conspicuous by their absence, become apprehensive at the first sign of their children bringing home non-Jewish dates. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the national Rabbinic body of Reform Rabbis, in a resolution adopted in 1973, declared "its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which

solemnizes a mixed marriage." And The New York Board of Rabbis, one of those extremely rare rabbinic organizations to embrace Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Rabbis, bars from membership any who officiate at intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews.

In the Christian community, reactions to intermarriage are possibly more diversified. Christian clergymen take their directions from the rules of their particular church and denomination, which differ from each other, but, generally, they do officiate at weddings between non-Jews and Jews. It is to be doubted, however, that the ordinary Christian lay-person is any more inclined to welcome and admit a stranger into a close-knit family structure than is the ordinary Jew.

With all of the impassioned attitudes vis-à-vis intermarriage, there is very little concern with the individuals who are intermarried; the human equation is all but neglected or ignored. This is a serious oversight, and the prevailing tendency in both the Jewish and Christian communities to turn their backs on them and let them fend for themselves is not in keeping with the human requirements of a caring society. A Jew and a Christian who wish to get married encounter almost insuperable obstacles, which go even beyond the objections raised by society. All kinds of deep-rooted feelings within themselves come into play. Powerful historic forces, ingrained religious beliefs, undiscovered subconscious prejudices, all exact their claim and often defy reconciliation.

In the Jewish wedding ceremony, the custom of drinking twice from the same cup of wine is often interpreted as being symbolic of two covenants entered into by the couple. One cup denotes an agreement that the bride and groom

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make with each other. The other represents a contract which both together make with the world around them.

For many couples of different religions both such agreements constitute a potent challenge and a painful dilemma. What shall they do? Shall they terminate a budding relationship, or consummate it by marriage? There are some, of course, who claim that the dilemma is no dilemma. They feel that religious and other differences are no longer important, that all that matters is the strength of their love, and they take courage from the lines by the American dramatist, Maxwell Anderson: "If two stand together shoulder to shoulder against the fates, happy, the fates themselves cannot prevail against them, if they stand so."

The majority of couples, however, are not so oblivious to the complexity of challenges which arise from their differing rootedness. They want to get married, but they retain, at least subconsciously, a relatedness to their own background. And what are the options confronting them — especially when children come? Shall they adopt as a way of life the religion of the person to whom religion and background mean more, or shall they attempt to build their relationship on mutual knowledge of, respect for, and even participation in, both religions, and thus — as it were — have the best of two worlds? It is to all these questions and many more — embracing, in fact, the whole problematic of intermarriage — that the books reviewed here address themselves.

Though the two works differ in treatment and quality, they are similar in their basic approach. Both feel that intermarriage can work if it is based on a mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's background, so they begin by explicating those back-

grounds. Thus, we find essays on both Jewish and Christian history, theology, rituals and laws, as well as discussions on how to bridge the differences between the two. There is information on psychological factors and even differing sexual attitudes. These essays are, in the main, well written and deal with their subjects fairly and sensitively and, for the most part, accurately.

It soon becomes clear, however, that there are telling differences in emphasis and purpose and some of these become obvious from the books' subtitles. *The Intermarriage Handbook* turns out to be what it claims to be: "A Guide for Jews and Christians," a *Nachschlagebuch*, a manual to be consulted when difficulties present themselves. It is "designed to give . . . a fair and in depth picture of the complexities of intermarriage and how potential problems may be turned into opportunities." In this respect, it fully succeeds, and, given the authors' basic philosophy which will be discussed further on, they have written a work which is intellectually honest, sound in scholarship, as objective as it is sensitive, indeed, a book of substance.

Happy Married, on the other hand, seems to be more ambitious and zealous in its objectives and, in the opinion of this reviewer, suffers from its excessive zeal. According to the book's subtitles, it wishes to offer "authoritative advice for a joyous Jewish-Christian marriage."

A member of the clergy himself, this reviewer cannot altogether suppress the suspicion that the expressive use of the adjectives "authoritative" and "joyous" is not unrelated to the fact that all three authors of the book — a Rabbi, a Priest and a Minister — are, in fact, clergymen and, as such, are inclined toward an exuberance with the spoken or written word which is sometimes marked more by exaggeration than by accuracy. In other

words, the book is often "preachy," a weakness which is evident throughout, and assumes, at times, an unpleasantly polemic character.

In spite of this, both books strive for objectivity. Neither of them, I suppose, would like to be accused of "pushing" intermarriage. *Happily Intermarried*, in fact, contains a whole chapter citing instances when intermarriages should not take place. Why, then, the lingering doubts that remain in this reviewer's mind as to the ultimate validity of the books?

In *The Intermarriage Handbook* there appears a chapter called "Beyond the December Dilemma." It begins with a discussion of the emotional and nostalgic impact of the Christmas tree on most Christians and some Jews, and proceeds to evaluate the role of all Holidays, which the authors brilliantly define as "religion and family at the gut level." To deal with the dilemma resulting from the observance of Holidays which are at "gut level" for some, but meaningless or even troublesome to other members of the family, the authors suggest a number of approaches, which they call "traditional," "minimal," "actively doing both" and "non-traditional." They are all presented with intelligence, integrity, sensitivity, and the best of intentions. And, yet, one wonders whether these approaches do not add up to a kind of *ersatz* religion which is simply no substitute for the real thing.

What meaningful connection is there really between Hanukkah and Christmas, other than the fact that they both occur at the time of the winter solstice and — in a vague poetic way — are harbingers of light? And of what benefit is it to anyone to force together two festivals one of which celebrates the virgin birth of the Christian Saviour, and the other a heroic victory to preserve the uniqueness of the Jewish way of life?

When Jews and Blacks sit together around a Seder table they may constitute an emotional and intellectual construct as they touch base in celebrating the ideals of liberation and freedom. At that point they will sing "Let my people go" in perfect harmony. But can this harmony in any way approximate the spirit of hope and exhilaration which Christians derive from the Resurrection, and Jews from the birth hour of their peoplehood and national destiny?

Perhaps an even more important question to consider is this: Will anything but "religion and family at gut level" be able to inspire and nurture those values which are a *sine qua non* in all of our lives, and particularly in the upbringing of children? I refer to loyalty and faith. And when the forces capable of moulding these values are dissipated by compromises or combinations, will they still have the desired impact?

It is in *Happily Intermarried*, however, that there occur statements which this reviewer finds most disquieting. We have already discussed the merits (or demerits) of the combination approach with regard to observance and ceremonies. But while it is offered as an alternative in *The Intermarriage Handbook*, it is strongly recommended by the authors of *Happily Intermarried*, especially where no definite decision in favor of one religion has been made. But what about the criteria for arriving at such a decision when it comes to raising a child?

"The first point we would like to emphasize is that neither Christianity nor Judaism can be the 'wrong' choice for your child," proclaim the authors of *Happily Intermarried* from the exalted heights of their ecumenicalism. Nevertheless, the statement strikes a jarring note. To begin with, questions as to the comparative merits of the two religions, or a statement that one is as good as

the other, or superior to the other, are highly debatable and deserve a far more in-depth and scholarly approach than the cavalier treatment given to them in the book. But is all this really to the point? Is not the real question one of concern about the anguish and frustration of the parent who sees his or her own religion discarded, and centuries of cherished tradition go down the drain?

Another chapter in the book is entitled "Certain Types of Jews" (what an ugly word to choose!). And who are those "types"? According to the authors: Orthodox Jews who insist on eating kosher, Jews who will not celebrate Christmas in their homes, and all others who, for whatever reason, "polemicize" against intermarriage, to use the authors' term. Bad as this name-calling is in itself, it almost staggers the imagination that a Rabbi has participated in the writing of this chapter. Could a Jew be so lacking in understanding as to be oblivious to the real reasons which influence Jewish attitudes vis-à-vis intermarriage?

This reviewer is a Liberal Rabbi who does not officiate at intermarriages. I readily admit that my decision does not always fill me with happiness. I often feel ambivalent about it, torn between two impulses. Often, every human feeling within me urges me to say "yes" when, in fact, I end up by saying "no." Why do I cling to my decision?

The specter of the Holocaust will haunt all decent people for a long time to come. It held the mirror to us all. It laid bare aspects of the human condition which we can never again conceal behind the frail facade of so-called civilization. For us Jews, however, the Holocaust has yet another meaning — and not even Jews are always fully aware of it. Well-meaning Christians often speak compassionately about the

unduly heavy and constant burden of unmitigated suffering and persecution which seems to be the special lot of the Jewish people. But other peoples have suffered and known persecution. The Holocaust was different. It went straight to the jugular vein. It was not just barbarism and suffering. It was genocide. It was an attempt that almost succeeded in eliminating an entire people.

To say that I react to this only emotionally or vengefully, or in view of my personal losses, would not do justice to the fullness of my feelings. The fact is that I react with all my instincts for self-preservation. I respond with my gut-determination to survive — physically, of course — but also with my full identity and with all my Jewish values intact. Survival — for the Jew — is unequivocal. It is not subject to philosophical debate or intellectual argument. Survival — for the Jew — is the name of the game. This is hardly surprising for a people which has just lost more than one-third of its numbers during the Holocaust. The experiences of our history have left us with a dominant sentiment: Every Jew who leaves us for whatever reason represents an irreplaceable loss to the Jewish people and a potential threat to its survival.

Such is the nature of my feelings and I am not ashamed of them. They do not affect my conviction that in a free and open society the rights of consenting adults to make, and act upon, their own decisions must be preserved and protected, and they do not cause me to reject those with whose decisions I disagree. My feelings do not diminish my anger at intolerance and prejudice whether it comes from Christians or Jews. But they do strengthen my resolve not to do anything that might further weaken, endanger or dissipate the integrity and viability of the Jewish people.

ple. And if this makes me one of those "types" referred in *Happily Intermarried*, so be it!

The two books under discussion may be commended on a number of things. Pointing to the fact that intermarriages have become a way of life for many, and are likely to increase in numbers, they have drawn renewed attention to the human equation involved. They have correctly defined the problems inherent in such relationships and, to the extent that they speak of them with sensitivity and empathy, they have made a contribution. Whether they succeed in being a guide, let alone an authoritative one, is arguable, but the attempt to be of help in already existing situations should be appreciated.

It is one thing, however, to say that an inter-religious marriage can be happy and even productive, and to offer the tools to make it so. It is quite another to idealize intermarriage *per se* and to imply that — as an institution — it is desirable. And while *The Intermarried Handbook* seems to be inclined toward the first approach, *Happily Intermarried* quite noticeably leans toward the second. In fact, reading some parts of this book one cannot resist the impression that the three authors look upon a love-marriage between a Christian and a Jew as symbolic of a new loving world still in the making, and world in which Christians and Jews, drawing inspiration from the common aspects of their two religions, walk arm in arm into a new inter-religious heaven. I think that the majority of both Christians and Jews will find such an analogy rather problematic.

There was a time when some Jewish parents said *kaddish* for a son or daughter who had "married out." Those days are, I hope, behind us for good, although the anguish remains. When parents consider that their children do wrong they should love them even more.

But, to take human realities which, because they are human, are deserving of understanding and empathy even in disagreement, and present them as shining examples of a new utopian order of religious oneness, does not only falsify the realities, but aggravates and multiplies the already all too plentiful problems inherent in intermarriage — problems for which the two books do not, indeed, cannot, provide valid solutions.

Reform and Jewish Law

Contemporary American Reform Responsa. By WALTER JACOB. New York. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1987. xxii + 322 pp., \$15.00.

Reviewed by JOEL ROTH

THE LITERATURE of the responsa has always been the greatest single repository of Jewish *realia*. Walter Jacob's *Contemporary American Reform Responsa* continues this tradition. Containing a total of 202 separate responsa, the volume presents the reader with the entire gamut of issues that have concerned American Jews in the past ten years. Among the topics addressed are: abortion, medical experimentation, genetic engineering, *in vitro* fertilization, vasectomies, homosexuality, and the marriage of homosexuals and transvestites. Not surprisingly, the single subject dealt with in by far the greatest number of responsa is intermarriage/conversion/patrilineal descent, including a host of issues that are related, like the participation of unconverted spouses in

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Jewish rites of passage, burial of non-Jewish spouses in Jewish cemeteries, mourning practices for non-Jewish family members, and gentiles in leadership positions in synagogues.

All of the responsa in the volume are the work of Walter Jacob himself. Only 30 of the total number were presented to the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis for reaction, comment, and discussion at meetings. Indeed, only one responsum in the entire collection (#160), dealing with non-Jewish participation in *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* services, contains any Committee disagreement whatsoever with the view of the author. One wonders, of course, how members of the Committee might have reacted to some of the other responsa had they been presented for discussion. It would be erroneous to understand the title of the volume to imply that the responsa are the official position of the Reform movement, except insofar as Walter Jacob is the chairman of the Responsa Committee and has held that position since 1976.

The responsa reflect the author's tremendous breadth of knowledge. Dr. Jacob refers consistently to halakhic literature, from the Bible to the latest responsa, and one cannot fail to be impressed by the scope of his familiarity with this vast literature, even if one may not agree with specific conclusions or with the approach of the Reform movement to *halakhah*.

The style of the responsa is far more discursive than textually analytical. They are, in essence, brief essays on a given subject which refer to, and summarize, earlier material. The actual texts of the earlier sources are rarely quoted and are almost never subject to the kind of careful analysis to which readers of classical responsa are accustomed. Many contain illuminating

and educational historical introductions or surveys of broad subjects, of which the specific question being addressed is but a small part.

The volume would be as useful for purely educational purposes as for halakhic decision-making, and it should not be ignored for either purpose by any segment of the religious Jewish community. One need not be associated with the Reform movement to agree, in many cases, with Jacob's conclusion. Occasionally, of course, more traditional halakhists would have to reject his conclusions because of ideological differences over such issues as the weight of precedent, or the circumstances that might warrant overturning precedent. None of these concerns, however, diminishes from the importance of this volume as a resource to be consulted and considered carefully even by those who are not part of the Reform movement. Such readers ought to study Dr. Jacob's brief introduction to the volume, for it contains a concise statement of his own theory of what constitutes valid halakhic decision-making, and provides the backdrop against which the responsa should be understood.

There are two problems with the volume, one of which could be easily remedied. The reference citations are too often incomplete, and sometimes they are inaccurate. If one wishes to accept Dr. Jacob's summary of the content of a primary source without verifying it or without seeing its precise wording, the citations are virtually irrelevant except to indicate that there is a source. But one who wishes to check the sources themselves would be better served by more complete and accurate citations.

The other problem is not so easily remedied, because of conflicting *desiderata*. The volume is organized according to the order of the *Shulhan Arukh*, which is an eminent-

ly reasonable order. Dr. Jacob apparently wanted the volume to contain the complete record of his correspondence as chairman of the Responsa Committee. Thus, there can be a series of consecutive responsa on exactly the same subject reflecting queries that Jacob received at different times. Reading these can be tedious and boring, since the responsa are, understandably, very repetitious. On the other hand, of course, if Dr. Jacob had published only one of them, we would not have received as clear a picture of how often the issue has arisen. It may perhaps be possible to publish the most thorough and extensive responsum on a subject, and provide a short note indicating how many other questions on the same subject have been received.

The index to the volume enhances its usefulness significantly, providing a topical listing of subjects covered, and includes references not only to this volume, but to *American Reform Responsa*, as well.

The growing library of Reform works on, and of, *halakhah* has been augmented by this fine volume, well written by a fine scholar. It reflects the ongoing grappling of the Reform movement with its relationship and attitude toward *halakhah* in general, as well as providing competent halakhic guidance on many subjects. *Contemporary American Reform Responsa* deserves not only to be read, but to be studied.

An Inspiring Answer

Why Me? By PESACH KRAUSS and MORRIE GOLDFISCHER. New York. Bantam Books, 1988. \$14.95.

Reviewed by SIMCHA KLING

SIMCHA KLING is Rabbi of Adat Jeshurun in Louisville, KY.

WHY ME? is a book that I have been eagerly awaiting. Pesach Krauss has been one of my closest friends for five decades and I well know what he has been through and how he has coped. When we first met I knew that, as a small child, he had lost a leg, but none of our friends ever regarded him as handicapped. As teen-agers we took long walks together and were very involved in Young Judea as well as social activities. Our friends never looked upon Pesach as different. We subsequently were graduated from the Seminary, married, met often and continued our close friendship. My wife and I suffered as Muriel's life slowly ebbed and then, as time passed, we were happy that he and Joan found such goodness in their life together.

Thus, the autobiographical parts of this book were quite familiar to me. Nevertheless, there are recorded facts and feelings which I had not known and they made me appreciate my friend all the more. Pesach Krauss, to whom life has not always been kind, has been able to empathize with people who have also had to cope with most difficult moments. He has found the wisdom to know what to say and what not to say, wisdom to indicate, even by tone of voice, that he cares and is ready to share burdens. Rabbi Krauss has been trained not only by the Jewish Theological Seminary but also by graduate programs in counseling. They have helped him develop skills but he, himself, in his own unique way and with his own unique personality, became the individual who was able to help others.

Why Me? is a book that tells case after case of individuals or their families who learned that one must appreciate whatever time one is granted. Its message is:

Each one of us is unique and irreplaceable. Every moment is pre-

cious, and not repeatable.... Life challenges us to discover our own specialness, our task, and to share with others.

In addition to serving as rabbi of a congregation in Brooklyn, Pesach Krauss is chaplain at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. The people he tells us about are the patients whom he sees, victims of cancer. The book, however, is in no way morbid. On the contrary, it is uplifting and reflects a glow that directs us to view all of life positively, even if beset by pain. For example, one terminal patient who was helped by Rabbi Krauss to overcome his sense of hopelessness, says:

I've learned the joy of just being open to experience the wonders of the world, its beauties, and its mysteries. I guess when you're hit with something and there's no way out, you have to find a way in, to live in greater depth.

In another chapter, Rabbi Krauss tells us:

Every day I see patients who straighten their priorities, who tell me how grief and love have deepened and widened their ability to participate in life as they had indeed never experienced it before in the good days when they had health but weren't aware of its blessing. They have become more grateful for all these gifts of life, companionship and love... They have become more sensitive to life's mystery and more trusting in their adventure with God or with life.

This is an inspirational book. In popular terms, it conveys a philosophy and theology that anyone can comprehend and appreciate. Every story, including the author's own, is interspersed with comments and observations that teach the preciousness of every moment. Colleagues as well as patients will derive much from *Why Me?* The book should be widely read.

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